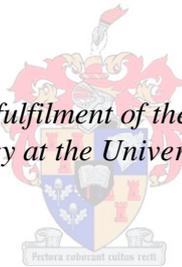


From Time-Bound to Timeless

The Rhetoric of Lamentations and Its Appropriation

by
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*Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch*



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Declaration

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Summary

This study postulates a unifying rhetorical function for the book of Lamentations during the Persian period. After the destruction of the temple in 587 BCE, the people of Judah were geographically scattered and religiously and culturally fragmented. Lamentations, with its ahistorical, timeless character, its acrostic form, its posture of protest, and its totalizing references to all the different classes and groups of Judahites, became a rallying point for Jews seeking restoration after the exile, as well as a perpetual reflection on YHWH's role in human suffering for oppressed Jews in many places and at many times through history.

The historical component of this study seeks to establish the fragmentation of Judah and the goals of the various Judahite groups during the Persian period. The literary component attempts to demonstrate Lamentations' suitability as a portable, timeless expression of suffering before YHWH, and as a source of imagery and motivation for Jewish restoration hopes.

This study contributes to the understanding of the formation of Jewish identity, which since the destruction of the first temple has been shaped by minority status in nearly every cultural context, and by the evolution of a portable, textual religion. This study concludes that the preservation of the book of Lamentations was both a reflection of and a contribution to these two aspects of Jewish identity.

This study also contributes to the interpretation of Lamentations—and the genre of communal lament—as literature and liturgy. It also explores the possibility of literary connections between Lamentations, Isaiah 40-55, and the genre of penitential prayers.

Opsomming

Hierdie studie postuleer 'n verenigende retoriese funksie vir die boek Klaagliedere gedurende die Persiese periode. Na die vernietiging van die tempel in 587 vC was die inwoners van Juda geografies versprei en godsdienstig en kultureel gefragmenteer. Klaagliedere se ahistoriese en tydlose karakter, die akrostiese vorm, die geneentheid tot protes, en die totaliserende verwysings na al die verskillende klasse en groepe van Judeërs, het 'n aanhakupunt geword vir Jode wat heropbou na die ballingskap nagestreef het, asook vir die voortgaande nadenke by onderdrukte Jode in baie plekke en tye deur die geskiedenis, oor Jahwe se rol in menslike lyding.

Die historiese komponent van hierdie studie probeer die fragmentering van Juda gedurende die Persiese periode vasstel, asook die doelwitte van die verskillende groepe in Juda. Die literêre komponent poog om te illustreer dat Klaagliedere uitermate geskik was as oordraagbare, tydlose uitdrukking van lyding voor Jahwe, en dat dit 'n bron van verbeelding en motivering vir die Joodse heropbou-hoop was.

Die studie dra by tot die verstaan van die vorming van Joodse identiteit wat sedert die vernietiging van die eerste tempel sterk beïnvloed is deur hul minderheidstatus in byna elke kulturele konteks, maar ook deur die ontwikkeling van 'n oordraagbare, tekstuele godsdienst. Hierdie studie kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat die bewaring van die boek Klaagliedere beide 'n nadenke oor en 'n bydrae tot hierdie twee aspekte van Joodse identiteit was. Die studie maak ook 'n bydrae tot die interpretasie van Klaagliedere—asook die genre van gemeenskaplike klag—as literatuur en liturgie. Dit ondersoek ook die moontlike literêre verhoudings tussen Klaagliedere, Jesaja 40-55 en die genre van boetepsalms.

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אילו האחד שיפול ואין שני להקימו:

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Abbreviations

ANE	Ancient Near East(ern)
Dtr	Deuteronomist
DtrH	Deuteronomistic History
HB	Hebrew Bible
LXX	Septuagint
NK	Northern Kingdom
SK	Southern Kingdom
TgLam	Targum of Lamentations

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I. PROBLEM STATEMENT

This study arises from a fascination with two features of the Hebrew Bible. First, it seems remarkable to the modern reader that the book of Lamentations—five poems that express so forcefully, so viscerally, so vividly, the emotion of the lowest point in a community’s history—became an integral part of that community’s scriptural canon and liturgical practice—and perhaps became so in a relatively short period of time.¹ The obligation and practice of ritual mourning is foreign to the modern Western reader, and has been explored in ancient and modern non-Western contexts.² Lamentations had a distinct rhetorical function in the post-587 BCE Yahwist communities that continued even after the second temple was built—otherwise, it presumably would not have survived as canonical scripture. The formational and social impact of this book, in the view of this author, is only beginning to be fully explored.

The second curious feature is the diversity of perspectives within the Hebrew Bible on its central event: the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 587 BCE. The Enneateuch—the nine-part serial narrative from Genesis to Kings—concludes with this formative event. The final shape of the Hebrew Bible is largely various attempts to make some sense out of this event and its ongoing implications in the community (or communities). These attempts at community renewal appeal to pre-catastrophic traditions (exodus event, Deuteronomistic theology, wisdom theology) in order to make a way forward post-catastrophe. An important question surfaces in each of these restoration programs/visions/ideologies: how does an oppressed minority community retain its identity and determine its boundaries? Each vision of community identity placed varying degrees of emphasis on ethnic background, culture,

¹ Lamentations is one of the *Megillot*, the five “little books” that are associated with Jewish holy days. Lamentations is read on the Ninth of Av, which commemorates the destruction of the first and second temples.

² Gary A. Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, a Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion* (The Pennsylvania State University Press: University Park, 1991); Xuan Huong Thi Pham, *Mourning in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); Tod Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

religious belief and religious practice. But within the variety of criteria for inclusion, each perspective hoped for the preservation and reconstitution of the people of Israel.

This study explores the interface between Lamentations as survival literature, and the survival goals of early second temple Judaism. How did Lamentations, like other literature of its time, contribute to the preservation of a geographically, ethnically and religiously fragmented Jewry during the Babylonian and Persian periods?

II. PREMISES

The thesis of this study is supported by a series of propositions, many of which build upon one another. These propositions, as well as the previous studies associated with these key ideas, will be stated briefly. The next section will discuss the different methods by which these propositions may be established in support of the thesis.

1. Communal laments (and city laments in particular) function in ancient societies to maintain community cohesion and unity in the midst of crisis.

ANE laments were not merely personal expressions of emotion. Laments were socially and religiously sanctioned, controlled ways of expressing grief.³ The performance of a lament fulfilled several important functions in a community. First, it contributed to social cohesion in the face of catastrophe.⁴ Second, it was a way of elevating the voices of survivors before the world and before heaven.⁵ Third, laments provided some sense of completion of the tragic event—a way for individuals and communities to move forward after tragedy.⁶

2. Lamentations has had remarkable longevity and influence as liturgical literature.

Even after the partial restoration under the Persian Empire, the book of Lamentations continued to play an important role in the religious life and social consciousness of the Jewish

³ This concept is not easily understood by modern Western readers, for whom the most authentic expressions of emotion involve spontaneity and individuality. See Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, a Time to Dance*, 8.

⁴ Mark E. Cohen, *The Canonical Lamentations of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Potomac, Md.: Capital Decisions Ltd., 1988).

⁵ Pham, *Mourning in the Ancient Near East*; Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*.

⁶ M.W. Green, "The Uruk Lament," *JAOS* 104 (1984): 253; Nancy C. Lee, *Singers of Lamentations: Cities Under Siege, From Ur to Jerusalem to Sarajevo* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 22.

people. Throughout the second-temple period, the Jews under Gentile rule continued to identify with Lamentations' poetic figures: the personified "Daughter of Zion," and the "(Every)man of affliction" in Lamentations 3.⁷ Rabbinic interpreters read Lamentations in light of the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE and the fall of the last Jewish stronghold during the Bar Kokhba revolt.⁸ Even to this day, Lamentations is read in the synagogue to commemorate the destruction of the temple on the Ninth of Av.⁹ Lamentations is portable "survivor" literature.¹⁰

3. The destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 587 BCE transformed the worship of YHWH.

There is little dispute on this point. The Hebrew Bible as a canon, and most of its constituent texts, relate in some way to the exile following the fall of Jerusalem. The DtrH ends Israel's grand narrative (Genesis to Kings) with this tragic event. The Latter Prophets foretell the destruction of Israel and Judah. The Psalms lament the destruction; Job grapples with YHWH's righteousness in its wake. Nearly all texts composed and/or edited subsequent to the exile wrestle with the consequences of the fall of Jerusalem.¹¹

4. Lamentations pertains to the events of 587 BCE.

This point is also rarely disputed, though Lamentations contains only a few veiled historical references. Provan seems to be virtually alone in disputing the setting of

⁷ Alan Mintz, "The Rhetoric of Lamentations and the Representation of Catastrophe," *Prooftexts 2* (1982), 9ff.

⁸ É. Levine, *The Aramaic Version of Lamentations* (New York: Hermon, 1976), 13; cf Shaye J.D. Cohen, "The Destruction from Scripture to Midrash," *Prooftexts 2* (1982): 17-39.

⁹ K. O'Connor, "The Book of Lamentations," 1011-1072 in *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: Vol. 6* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

¹⁰ Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 43; Christine Mitchell, "'How Lonely Sits the City': Identity and the Creation of History," 71-83 in Jon L. Berquist, ed., *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period* (Atlanta: SBL, 2007).

¹¹ In *The Templeless Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), Jill Middlemas explores the formative effect of "templelessness" on the post-587 BCE communities. She argues that the catastrophe forced the Yahwistic communities to adopt new strategies for coping with the loss and maintaining community identity (esp. 137ff).

The main value of the Persian period for Judaism, argues Lester L. Grabbe in *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period, Volume 1: Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), is the relative obscurity of Yehud within the empire, which permitted the community to make unencumbered intellectual and spiritual progress (360).

Lamentations between 587 BCE and the Persian conquest of Babylon (539 BCE).¹² However, the a- or trans-historic nature of the book has been noted¹³ and will be explored in chapter four of this study.

5. Based on Propositions 2-4: Lamentations is thematically and ideologically related to certain Yahwistic expressions emerging from 587 BCE.

Previous studies have demonstrated relationships between Lamentations and the genre of penitential prayer,¹⁴ the dependence of Second Isaiah on the imagery and rhetoric of Lamentations,¹⁵ the role of city laments in the rebuilding of a temple,¹⁶ and the modulation of city-lament rhetoric in some exilic and postexilic Oracles Against the Nations.¹⁷

6. Various Yahwistic communities emerged from 587 BCE and came into conflict in the Babylonian and Persian periods.

On this point there is consensus. Ezra-Nehemiah's accounts of the restoration efforts record perpetual conflict between the "people of the land" (sometimes abbreviated "AH," *`am ha'ares*) and the returning *golah* (exile) community. Furthermore, Jewish communities in Egypt (Jer 42-44, 46) and the east (Daniel 1-6, Esther, Tobit) developed different modes of religious expression apart from the rebuilt Jerusalem temple.¹⁸

¹² Iain W. Provan, *Lamentations* (New Century Bible Commentary series; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 11-19.

¹³ Cohen, "The Destruction from Scripture to Midrash," 19; Paul M. Joyce, "Sitting Loose to History: Reading the Book of Lamentations Without Primary Reference to Its Original Historical Setting," 246-62 in *In Search of True Wisdom: Essays in Old Testament Interpretation in Honour of Ronald E. Clements*, E. Ball, ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); Provan, *Lamentations*.

¹⁴ Mark J. Boda, "The Priceless Gain of Penitence: From Communal Lament to Penitential Prayer in the 'Exilic' Liturgy of Israel," 81-101 in N. C. Lee and C. Mandolfo, eds., *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts* (Atlanta: SBL, 2008); Richard Bautch, *Developments in Genre Between Post-Exilic Penitential Prayers and the Psalms of Communal Lament* (Atlanta: SBL, 2003).

¹⁵ Patricia Tull Willey, *Remember the Former Things: The Recollection of Previous Texts in Second Isaiah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

¹⁶ Middlemas, *The Templeless Age*, 29-30; F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993), 92-93; Daniel Fleming, "Ur: After the Gods Abandoned Us," *The Classical World* 97 (2003), 12; M.W. Green, "The Eridu Lament," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 30 (1978): 128.

¹⁷ Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 97-156.

¹⁸ Middlemas, *The Templeless Age*, 19-27; Grabbe, *History of the Jews and Judaism*, 240-43.

7. Based on Propositions 5-6: Lamentations relates somehow to the conflict between visions of Yahwistic expression.

This proposition will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four. Dobbs-Allsopp argues that one of the goals of the Lamentations poet is to perpetuate the Zion tradition, one of the strongest traditions in Israel's history, even in the wake of Zion's destruction.¹⁹ The ongoing fact of Zion's humiliation now cries out against YHWH, thus preserving a more "portable" Zion tradition in the exile/Diaspora.

At a very basic level, the adoption of Lamentations as a canonical text has implications for the constitution of the faith community. These implications will be explored more deeply in the concluding chapter.

8. The major "conflict" in Lamentations is not between groups but between YHWH and his people (i.e., disobedience).

Lamentations does contain criticism of certain classes and groups within Judah, such as the priests and prophets (2:14; 4:13). But the primary conflict within the book is between YHWH and Judah personified collectively as the Daughter of Zion.

9. The genre of "penitential prayer" developed from the lament tradition.

Bautch has demonstrated the form-critical development from the psalms of communal lament to the genre of penitential prayer.²⁰ Boda traces the development of the penitential prayer tradition,²¹ of which one origin is the tradition of Lamentations. Boda considers Lamentations 3 to be a sort of mediating form between the more accusatory chapters of Lamentations and the humble penitential prayers.²²

10. Certain exilic and postexilic texts, especially Isaiah 40-55, use language of Lamentations to map an inclusive restoration.

¹⁹ F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "R(az/ais)ing Zion in Lamentations 2," in B.F. Batto and K.L. Roberts, eds., *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J.J.M. Roberts* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 21-68.

²⁰ Bautch, *Developments in Genre*.

²¹ Boda, *Praying the Tradition: The Origin and Use of Tradition in Nehemiah 9* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999).

²² Boda, "The Priceless Gain of Penitence," 95.

Willey observes strong linguistic and thematic connections between Lamentations and Second Isaiah.²³ In her view, Second Isaiah provides an answer to the accusations and questions of Lamentations, “mining the poetry” of suffering so as to reverse the imagery into that of restoration.²⁴ Allusions may also be found in Isaiah 63-64; Zechariah 3, 5; and the penitential prayers (mentioned above).

11. Based on Propositions 7-10: Lamentations was applied liturgically and politically to bring about the unity of the Yahwistic communities. Through its literary and rhetorical features, Lamentations was used to envision a restoration that would have brought together the disparate communities in Babylon, Egypt and Yehud after the exile.

III. METHODOLOGY

The ultimate purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the understanding of the Old Testament texts. To that end, this study examines the historical background of Lamentations, its construction as a literary unit, and its liturgical and social use. The main area of exploration is the interface between the formation of Lamentations and its historical function. Thus, historical and literary critical methods are of equal import (see discussion below of Dobbs-Allsopp, “Rethinking Historical Criticism”), subservient to the goal of aiding interpretation of the text itself. Rhetorical criticism combines both literary and historical inquiry: how does a text as literature and spoken word both reflect and shape the communities in which it was historically formed and performed?

Any undertaking of literary or historical criticism will force the author to make subjective judgments. While every attempt will be made to appeal to established “objective” fact, the danger of confirmatory bias is always present. Demonstrating similarity is simple; establishing correlation is complicated, and proving causation is still more difficult.

This study is conducted from a point of view that reveres the biblical texts as sacred communication from God through humans to humankind. However, this does not require that the biblical narratives be taken naïvely at face value—indeed, it does not seem that they were intended to convey “pure history” in a modern sense. For this author, the discernment of

²³ Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, esp. 125-32.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 267.

authorial intent, despite all the well-documented pitfalls and difficulties that come along with such a notion, is nevertheless the goal of biblical criticism.

Historical and archaeological studies are therefore necessary to discern what the biblical texts meant in their day, and in particular, how the authors/editors chose to present the information available to them. To discern critically and carefully what is actually preserved in the sacred texts is to honor the texts themselves and the deity who reveals himself in them.

Furthermore, historical criticism necessitates the study of ancient texts as literature. The literary component of this study will build upon 1) studies of diversity and protest in Lamentations; 2) sociological studies of the function of laments; 3) studies of poetic discourse, including the use of the acrostic technique; etc.

The following sections will discuss the challenges of historical and literary study of Scripture, and set forth some general principles by which this study will be conducted.

Historical Criticism

This study engages the historical enterprise on two levels. First, the line of historical inquiry (subservient to biblical interpretation as stated above) involves in some sense “writing a history”—or a very small portion of a history—of Yahwistic communities in the Persian period. Second, the present “historiographical” operation will entail a critical engagement with *ancient* historiography.²⁵

As a point of entry into the study of historiography, historical criticism and community identity, this section will briefly examine the contributions of three scholars: a biblical scholar, a philosopher of history, and an ancient historian.

In an essay entitled, “Rethinking Historical Criticism,”²⁶ Dobbs-Allsopp assesses the current state of biblical historical studies and some of the broad trends of the last two centuries. The problem he addresses is the wedge that has been driven between historical criticism and ahistoricist literary criticism, i.e., those who read literature just to get to history behind it and those who read literature with little regard for historical context. He states that

²⁵ In this study the phrases “historiography” and “writing history” are used interchangeably. The term “history” may refer to “past events,” or it may refer to *a* specific presentation of the past—a product of historiography.

²⁶ F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Rethinking Historical Criticism,” *Biblical Interpretation* 7(1999): 235-71. The essence of my analysis of Dobbs-Allsopp’s essay was presented as part of “How Lonely Sits the Text: Lamentations 1-2 and Evangelical Appropriation of Postmodern Biblical Studies” (Eastern regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, March 4, 2011), 3-5.

his goal is “to provide a programmatic introduction to some of the major themes of historicist literary study and to explore how this body of work may help biblical scholars rethink historical criticism as a specifically literary method of study and reading.”²⁷

Dobbs-Allsopp argues that knowledge is both *constructed* and *textual*. If the critic cannot bracket herself out of the process of interpretation, she must realize that “meaning is ultimately not found but made.”²⁸ This fact becomes even more plain once she realizes that meaning is expressed in language, which is inevitably culturally (contextually) dependant.²⁹ “There are no brute facts unmediated by some interpretive process.”³⁰

Dobbs-Allsopp distinguishes between critical historicism and “radical historicism.” Radical historicism has no hope that the blurred context of the author and the blurring context of the interpreter can be cleared to reveal anything meaningful. Radical historicism, then, is the rejection of the Cartesian eagerness for certainty,³¹ taken to its logical conclusion: “subjectivist free-play and nihilism.”³² Dobbs-Allsopp counters that the radical historicist denial of history fails to provide a paradigm for those things that human beings *know* are historically real. Dobbs-Allsopp offers a *critical historicism* as the *via media* between the foundationalist position and radical historicism:

Critical historicism wants to ally a poststructuralist reading strategy with the historicist respect for the other and belief that the cultural and social milieu in which past literary works originated is likely to be relevant for understanding those works.³³

The dangers on either side of this “middle way” are the tendency to give too much credence to the ancient context (objectivist determinism) and the tendency to discount the ancient context altogether (radical historicism). Critical historicism situates the reader as an equal, respectful dialogue partner with the text, rather than worshiping or trashing the past.

Dobbs-Allsopp tries to offer a constructive way to do biblical studies in the wake of the postmodern critique of modernism.³⁴ However, it is difficult to find any solace in his

²⁷ Dobbs-Allsopp, “Rethinking Historical Criticism,” 238.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 245.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 247.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 248.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 262-63.

³² *Ibid.*, 251.

³³ *Ibid.*, 252.

assertion that the only certainty that can be reached about the past is through a consensus of “experts”:

A critical historicism...makes no claims for correct meaning. Valid interpretations are those which prove politically efficacious in that they are able to persuade the larger interpretive community of their validity. There is nothing which necessitates a single correct interpretation.³⁵

In his landmark work, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur outlines what he calls the three “phases” of the historiographical operation. The “documentary phase” is concerned with the gathering of information—from testimonies, documents (which are written testimonies) and archives. The second phase, the phase of “explanation/understanding,” answers the question, “Why did things happen like that and not otherwise?” The third phase is the “representative phase,” in which the historian “offers a discourse to the readers of history.” Of course, the historian immediately recognizes that these phases are not chronologically distinguished; they are “interwoven with one another”; at each phase the historian will refer to the other two.³⁶

The goal of historiography, Ricoeur states, ought to be “a true reconstruction of the past.”³⁷ Far from being naïve, Ricoeur as a well-read philosopher of history knows all the attendant difficulties of such an undertaking. Questions of epistemology are encountered at every phase.

Ricoeur posits that the goal of historiography is “the just allotment of memory.”³⁸ History, by definition, cannot be repeated or experienced a second time; all that exists of it is an image in the mind³⁹—a *memory* distinguished from *imagination* by the notion that the memory is a trace of something that was actually experienced. Memories thus define

³⁴ Dobbs-Allsopp’s own body of work on Lamentations exemplifies a valiant attempt at this balance between literary studies such as his essay, “R(az/ais)ing Zion in Lamentations 2,” 21-68 in B.F. Batto and K.L. Roberts, eds., *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J.J.M. Roberts* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004), and historical studies such as *Weep, O Daughter of Zion* (see above).

³⁵ Dobbs-Allsopp, “Rethinking Historical Criticism,” 260.

³⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, K. Blamey and D. Pellauer, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 136-37.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 137.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, xv (Preface); cf 86ff.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

individual and collective identity.⁴⁰ Being a “just” individual or society then, for Ricoeur, entails remembering and *commemorating* events as they were and according to their true significance. This is, of course, the whole problem with historiography, particularly Ricoeur’s interpretive and representative phases: who is fit “justly to allot memory” and to represent memories accurately?

Ricoeur regards the modern historiographical enterprise as resting on a tacit “contract” between the writer and reader of an historical text:

[Both parties] agree that it will deal with situations, events, connections, and characters who once really existed, that is, before the narrative of them is put together, the interest or pleasure in reading coming as a kind of added surplus. The question now posed is whether, how, and to what degree the historian satisfies the expectation and promise conveyed by this contract.⁴¹

Ricoeur advocates narrative historiography, which had received significant criticism in the twentieth century.⁴² Historians and philosophers debated whether they should tell grand stories or short stories, collective stories or individual stories, and whether they should tell stories at all. Narrative, Ricoeur argued, is simultaneously an essential part of historiography and its shortcoming. The narrative form “adds its modes of intelligibility to those of explanation/understanding; in turn these figures of style can be recognized to be figures of thought capable of adding a specific dimension of exhibition to the readability belonging to narratives.”⁴³ But narrative form also betrays history’s continuous nature by “giving the narrative a closure internal to the plot,” even when the narrator tries to “deceive [the readers] through strategies aimed at a kind of non-ending. In this way the very act of recounting comes to split off from that ‘real’ thereby put in parentheses.”⁴⁴ But the representation of history is unavoidably narrational, since narrative is the only guarantee of meaning.⁴⁵

As we turn to the historical period which is our present concern, we find two obstacles to the study of ancient historiography: that it is *ancient*, and that it is *historiography*. Almost any assessment of ancient representation of history by contemporary standards will find much

⁴⁰ Ibid., 78-80, 93ff.

⁴¹ Ibid., 275.

⁴² For a discussion of narrative and its role in historiography, cf. Elizabeth Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 86-105.

⁴³ Ricoeur, *MHF*, 276.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 276.

⁴⁵ Clark, *History, Theory, Text*, 90.

to be desired. Rather than holding the ancient historian to the same “contract” by which the modern writer and reader of history are bound, the modern historian must seek to understand the expectations of the author and reader of the ancient historiographical text. By working through Ricoeur’s three phases in our examination of ancient history, we are able to assess the *représentance* (“standing-for”)⁴⁶ of history in the Hebrew Bible and the interpretive work of Yahwistic communities in the centuries following the destruction of Jerusalem.

The Hebrew Bible is a collection of memories that have defined the identities of several communities (Jewish and Christian) throughout history. It should be emphasized that the consideration of the Hebrew Bible as “history” should not be limited to the narrative books. Lamentations, Daniel, Proto-Zechariah and Second Isaiah are *interpretive* and *representative* of history insofar as they both appeal to and attempt to shape collective memory.

In an essay entitled, “The ‘Sacred’ Text and the Community,”⁴⁷ Ricoeur addresses the role of a sacred text in shaping the identity of religious community. The authority of a text, he explains, is reciprocally related to the founding of the community: the text is recognized and canonized by the community as foundational, but then the text shapes the continuing identity of the community.⁴⁸ In Jewish and Christian traditions, the text then takes on a new dynamic when it is spoken and preached in the community: “Preaching is the permanent reinterpretation of the text that is regarded as grounding the community; therefore, for the community to address itself to another text would be to make a decision concerning its social identity.”⁴⁹

This study is not concerned as a matter of first importance with the historicity of these images—whether they are “memories” or “imagination”—so much as their function within the communities. Secondly, however, we understand the interpretive and rhetorical goals of the texts by distinguishing “memory” from “imagination”—a complex but crucial task.

An extreme skepticism would regard all representation of the past in the Hebrew Bible as not “standing for” an actual past—i.e., biblical historiographies are fictions constructed to

⁴⁶ Ricoeur, *MHF*, 235.

⁴⁷ Paul Ricoeur, “The ‘Sacred’ Text and the Community,” 68-72 in M.I. Wallace, ed., *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

create collective consciousness.⁵⁰ Such complete skepticism almost certainly overstates the ability of collective memory to be manipulated, especially within only a few generations.⁵¹ Rather, memory is shaped “along the margin,” and then reassessed at times of major crisis, such as the fall of Jerusalem. Far from creating a whole new set of memories and traditions, the exilic and postexilic writings sought to allot/apportion/align memory appropriately—*justly*, from their perspectives.⁵² The ancient authors perceived themselves as *faithful* (in the dual sense of “representing what actually happened” and “from a faith perspective”) commemorators of Israel’s past.

This is of course what makes the exilic and postexilic literature so fascinating. How were communal memories of YHWH’s greatness and faithfulness evaluated in light of the destruction of his temple and the fall of his people?

How did ancient authors create and adapt material to shape their own communities’ identities? What was the nature of the tacit “contract” between ancient writer and reader, particularly in the Second Temple Period? In a monograph on the Pentateuch, Ska outlines five well-known principles for understanding and interpreting ancient literature.⁵³

First, for the ancients authority is rooted in antiquity. “It is clear...that the texts of the Pentateuch want to show the antiquity of Israel’s traditions: Israel is older than the Monarchy and older than the Conquest of the land....Antiquity is needed to prove the worth of Israel’s traditions to the nations.”⁵⁴ Literature set in the exilic and postexilic periods appeal to ancient traditions “to show that Israel’s God was not at all inferior to the powerful divinities of the conquerors.”⁵⁵

Second, nothing is eliminated from tradition—only additions may be made. This is why contradictory traditions stand in tension, for example, in the legal material of the Pentateuch: legal practice changes, but the sacred word is still preserved. While this is true of individual edited and redacted texts of the Hebrew Bible, the Hebrew Bible itself is a prime example: changing attitudes and traditions preserved as part of a single canon.

⁵⁰ E.g., Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

⁵¹ Lawrence Schiffman, *From Text to Tradition* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1991), 19.

⁵² Mitchell, “How Lonely Sits the City.”

⁵³ Jean-Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, Sr. Pascale Dominique, trans. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 165-83.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 167. Michael Fishbane (*Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) explains this process at work in Jewish tradition (1-19).

Third, the past is preserved because it has ongoing implications for the present. Deuteronomy 5:3 is an example within the Pentateuch: the covenant is said to have been “made,” not “renewed,” with the second generation preparing to enter the Promised Land. Exilic and postexilic restoration texts constantly appeal to the past as a basis for action in the present; for example, Ezra-Nehemiah casts the *golah* return from Babylon as a second exodus.⁵⁶ This principle is the impetus for inquiry into the meaning and application of Lamentations in past eras: how were these poems of ongoing significance to the Persian-era communities, so as to make them worthy of conservation?

Fourth, because writing was an expensive process, only that which was very important was preserved. This principle is somewhat in tension with the second principle (conservation). These two principles together support one of the premises of this study: Lamentations was preserved in the canon because it continued an important function in the community long after the events described had transpired.

Finally, since ancient texts are written in context, other works from the same period may offer insight into the methods and content of the biblical texts. However, the value of such comparative study can be overestimated. The Hebrew Bible is a collection of Jewish religious texts substantially from the Persian period (with exceptions); for better or worse, these are the only such texts we have. Comparison to non-Jewish religious texts of the period, or to later Jewish texts, is helpful, but only to a point.

The relationship between “biblical Israel” and “ancient Israel” has been the subject of much debate in the past forty years.⁵⁷ After the breakdown of the so-called “Albright consensus,” historians have been sometimes divided into “minimalists” and “maximalists” with regard to the reliability of the biblical texts. Grabbe notes that these labels are frequently pejorative and represent a polarized caricature of what is really a wide spectrum of views.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ J. Gordon McConville, “Ezra-Nehemiah and the Fulfillment of Prophecy,” *VT* 36 (1986): 205-24. Cf. K. Koch, “Ezra and the Origins of Judaism,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 19 (1974): 173-97.

⁵⁷ Recent studies include: Philip R. Davies and Diana V. Edelman, eds., *The Historian and the Bible: Essays in Honour of Lester L. Grabbe* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010); William G. Dever, *Who Were The Early Israelites, And Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001); Lester L. Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?* (London: T&T Clark, 2007).

⁵⁸ Grabbe, *History of the Jews and Judaism*, 12.

Like Dobbs-Allsopp and Ricoeur, Grabbe wrestles with the postmodern and minimalist critiques of history.⁵⁹ His perspective could perhaps be called a sort of *critical realism*:⁶⁰ acknowledging that historical knowledge is limited and perspectival, yet still holding the past in regard as a worthy other to be respectfully but critically examined. History is not simply “a discussion of problems and possibilities,” but involves making “subjective decisions about sources and interpretation.” Speculation, however, should be “clearly labeled and its basis indicated.”⁶¹

Grabbe introduces five principles for writing ancient history:⁶²

1. Historical knowledge is possible, but our access to the past is only indirect.
2. All our historical knowledge is contingent and provisional.
3. Although objectivity in the scientific sense is not possible, ‘qualified objectivity’ or some similar position is still possible in historical study.
4. The ultimate goal is a total history, which takes into account all aspects of the past.
5. We must use all potential sources.

Grabbe outlines some of the difficulties with writing a history of the Persian period, particularly the lack of direct sources from this period. His focus is the primary material as far as possible. He tries carefully to utilize the tools of the social sciences in his examination, recognizing the pitfalls of such an attempt.⁶³ Like most critical historians, Grabbe finds that “certain sorts of data in the biblical text are more likely (a priori) to be reliable than others” (14). The texts of the Hebrew Bible pertaining to the Persian period are mostly (but not exclusively) written from *golah* perspectives, which came to dominate the religious life of Yehud. Establishing minority perspectives from hostile texts can be tricky.

⁵⁹ See Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?*; *ibid.*, *History of the Jews and Judaism*, 2-20; *ibid.*, “Jewish Historiography and Scripture in the Hellenistic Period,” 129-155, and “Who Were the First Real Historians? On the Origins of Critical Historiography,” 156-81 in Grabbe, ed., *Did Moses Speak Attic? Jewish Historiography and Scripture in the Hellenistic Period* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); *ibid.*, “‘The Exile’ Under the Theodolite: Historiography as Triangulation,” 80-100 in Grabbe, ed., *Leading Captivity Captive: ‘The Exile’ as History and Ideology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

⁶⁰ The editors (Davies and Edelman) of a *Festschrift* presented to Grabbe (*The Historian and the Bible*) suggest that he would embrace the label “pre-postmodern” (xiv).

⁶¹ Grabbe, *History of the Jews and Judaism*, 2-3.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 14-16.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

However, there is historical justification for accepting certain sorts of information embedded in *golah*-perspective texts concerning the beliefs and practices of the *she'erit*⁶⁴ and Diaspora communities. For example, portrayals of these other communities' syncretistic practices are likely to be largely accurate and not exaggeration, since the other communities would not have become defensive about syncretism.

It is important to acknowledge this author's own Christian bias in an historical approach to the Hebrew Bible. The fragmentation of second temple Judaism has been sometimes used to advance a Christian narrative, i.e., the New Testament's presentation of Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfillment of the restoration hopes of the exilic and second temple communities. The earliest followers of Jesus self-identified as true Israel, forged in a new exodus—not unlike many other Persian- and Hellenistic-era Jews.

The purpose in acknowledging the author's Christian perspective is to strengthen this study by anticipating and diffusing potential criticism. On the other hand, it is important not to discount the Bible as an historical source simply because some consider it sacred. Suspicion of the theological and ideological presentation of facts is warranted, from an historical standpoint. However, the biblical texts should not be subject to fiercer scrutiny than other ancient texts.⁶⁵

Literary Criticism

For the purposes of the present study, literary criticism and rhetorical criticism will be considered alongside one another. Literary criticism considers not only the author's intentions and devices but also the contexts in which a text is read; rhetorical criticism emphasizes the reception of a text (often in its spoken form) and its devices in various contexts. As emphasized above, neither literary criticism nor rhetorical criticism should be divorced from historical inquiry, and both aid historical inquiry.

One of the literary/rhetorical devices most relevant to the present study is that of intertextuality. Intertextuality as a device has not always been given its proper due. Romanticism greatly influenced biblical interpretation in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Romanticism emphasized originality of expression and breaking free of tradition.

⁶⁴ The usage of the term שארית (“remnant”/“leftover”)—analogous to גולה (“exile”) and referring to the communities of Judahites left in the land after 587 BCE—is purely descriptive, chosen to avoid the theological associations with the English term “remnant.”

⁶⁵ Hans M. Barstad, “The Strange Fear of the Bible: Some Reflections on the ‘Bibliophobia’ in Recent Ancient Israelite Historiography,” 120-27 in *Leading Captivity Captive*.

This resulted in quite a few skewed approaches to Old Testament (and New Testament) criticism. For example, Wellhausen argued that the supposed local, spontaneous, clan-based religion of J and E was a truer expression of worship than the centralized, formalized religion of D and P.⁶⁶ Interpreters of the Latter Prophets, for example, Duhm, presupposed that material that was borrowed or adapted from previous texts was not original to the prophet, since “the prophets spoke only God’s words and not human tradition.”⁶⁷

Biblical scholarship began to recover from romanticism after the World Wars. Most scholars now appreciate the “originality” of many biblical texts previously belittled as derivative. The use of predetermined or traditional form in literature is no longer considered to reflect invariably a lack of creativity, but often a heightened creativity within limits.⁶⁸ Appropriation and adaptation of previous texts is now fruitfully explored as the complex and fascinating world of intertextuality.

Chapters three and five of this study deal with intertextuality. Chapter three will be an historical study of certain varieties of lament traditions in the ancient world, and therefore will evaluate connections between lament texts, both within the Hebrew Bible and without. Chapter five will address the possible relationships between Lamentations and other Persian-era texts.

Defining the limits of intertextuality is a challenging task. When we encounter two apparently similar texts, there are four possible relationships between them:

- One text is directly dependent upon the other as a source.
- Both texts are directly dependent upon a third text.
- The similarities between the texts are coincidental and the two are unrelated.
- The texts draw from the same cultural domain of discourse and are thus conversant in similar language and themes.

All discourse is intertextual in nature: a word has meaning in relation to its immediate context as well as previous contexts in which the word has been used.

⁶⁶ Gordon Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 170.

⁶⁷ Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 16.

⁶⁸ Benjamin D. Giffone, “A ‘Perfect’ Poem: The Use of the QATAL Verbal Form in the Biblical Acrostics,” *Hebrew Studies* 51 (2010): 50-53. Chapter four of this study explores the use of the alphabetic acrostic form in Lamentations.

The intertextuality of Jewish writings in the Persian period bears some resemblance to the New Testament's use of the Hebrew Bible as scripture. These two sets of literature are alike in at least three ways. First, both sets of texts are produced by communities struggling to maintain collective identity as a minority in a new set of religious and political circumstances. For Persian-era Jews, their circumstances were the fall of Jerusalem and their continuing oppression under Gentile rule. For first-century Christians, it was the resurrection and proclaimed victory of Jesus as messiah, amid adverse religious and political circumstances.⁶⁹ Second, both sets of texts present a sort of restoration of Israel that would in some measure reverse the events of 587 BCE. In the New Testament, first-century Israel is portrayed as still "exiled" in some sense.⁷⁰ Third, both sets of literature appeal to the antiquity and consequent authority of Israel's Scripture as the basis for community identity and restoration programs.

In his seminal work on Paul's use of the Hebrew Bible, Hays offers seven tests for proposed "echoes" of Hebrew scripture within Pauline texts.⁷¹ Some of these tests apply equally to supposed echoes of Lamentations in Persian-period literature, whereas others may be helpful with certain caveats.

The first test is *availability*: whether "the proposed source of the echo was available to the author and/or original readers."⁷² This test requires diachronic analysis of the texts in question. Questions of the date, compositional history and availability of Lamentations will be addressed in chapter four.

Second, the *volume* of an echo is determined by two factors: "the degree of explicit repetition of words or syntactical patterns,"⁷³ and the rhetorical prominence and/or distinctiveness of either the precursor text or the "echoing" text. How important is this text in its original context or in this new context?

⁶⁹ The claim that Jesus had been raised from the dead and proclaimed the world's true lord, and the apparently contradictory historical and political reality that Caesar was still in charge, produced the New Testament's peculiar eschatology. See Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (San Jose: Pickwick Publications, 2002); N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

⁷⁰ In *Jesus and the Victory of God*, N.T. Wright explains: "In Jesus' day many, if not most, Jews regarded the exile as still continuing. The people had returned in a geographical sense, but the great prophecies of restoration had not yet come true" (126-27).

⁷¹ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 29-33.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 29.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 30.

The third test of an echo is how often it *recurs* in the literature. This test will be somewhat complicated in the present study by the diversity of authorship and background of Persian period texts (as opposed to a definite Pauline canon). Second Isaiah's apparent use of a particular motif from Lamentations does not bear directly on whether the author of Nehemiah 9 had that same motif in mind. The cumulative weight of the influence of Lamentations on the Persian-period literature is precisely what this study aims to demonstrate.⁷⁴

Fourth, Hays suggests that an echo should be judged by whether it contributes to the *thematic coherence* of the text. He acknowledges that this test moves past simple recognition of echoes to the interpretation of the echoes themselves.⁷⁵

Fifth, an echo must be *historically plausible*. This is perhaps the most difficult of the tests, since it requires "getting into the minds" of the authors in their contexts, without imposing on the texts themes or agendas that are foreign to the ancient authors. Hays elaborates, "The value of the test is to make us wary of readings that turn Paul into (say) a Lutheran or a deconstructionist. One implication of this criterion is to give serious preference to interpretive proposals that allow Paul to remain a Jew."⁷⁶ Likewise, a study of any ancient period must resist the temptation to read contemporary concerns (e.g., gender/class struggles) into the texts.

The sixth test of an echo is whether the echo has been recognized in the *history of interpretation*. "Have other readers, both critical and pre-critical, heard the same echoes?"⁷⁷ The history of the interpretation of Lamentations in later periods (Hellenistic, Rabbinic, etc.) is partly the impetus for this study. If later communities viewed Lamentations as formative of community identity, perhaps communities of the immediate postexilic period did as well.

Hays' final criterion is essentially a "smell test": does the proposed reading make sense, "illuminating the surrounding discourse," and "producing for the reader a satisfying account of the effect of the intertextual relation"?⁷⁸

Hays provides a helpful set of criteria for evaluating the phenomenon of intertextuality. He points out that intertextual study needs to focus not just on the similarities

⁷⁴ Ibid., 30.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 30.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 30-31.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 31.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 32.

between cited and citing texts, but also the contrasts.⁷⁹ For example, Isaiah 40-55 uses the imagery of the disgraced woman sitting in the dust (Lam 1:8-12, 2:10) in two ways: Daughter Zion's fate is reversed (Isa 52:1-2), and Daughter Babylon suffers Zion's previous fate (47:1-3).⁸⁰

Richard Bautch examines the development of the genre of communal lament into the postexilic genre of penitential prayer.⁸¹ It would be a mistake, Bautch explains, to assume that the re-use of scripture in later contexts in the second temple period may be simply extrapolated backward into the sixth and fifth centuries. But the phenomenon of intertextuality was prominent and developing in the postexilic period.⁸² In *lieu* of a monograph-length treatment of the subject, which Bautch feels is conspicuously absent, he offers five principles of intertextuality in the sixth and fifth centuries.

First, the re-use of Scripture was undertaken with attention to *form* as well as *content*. Bautch argues that postexilic prophecy "reflects earlier forms that have undergone revision;" for example, the כְּ (covenant lawsuit) form is reflected in Nehemiah 9:6-37.⁸³

Second, the re-use of Scripture is based upon an internal logic and consistency. Texts that utilize earlier texts do so in a manner consistent with the dominant element of the re-using text. An example relevant to Bautch's particular study is the use of Deuteronomistic retribution theology, which is closely related to the dominant element of penitential prayer: sin. Thus, it is not surprising that the prayers frequently appeal to the DtrH.

Third, the author's conscious interpretation of a scriptural source is secondary to the prominence of genre and generic elements. The meaning of the text at hand is primary, while the author's reasons for appropriating earlier texts are secondary. Here Bautch may be setting up a false dichotomy. Since all verbal expression is intertextual, both the generic *and* content elements of a text are appropriated by the author with varying degrees of "originality" and intentionality. Bautch is correct, however, that it is nearly impossible to demonstrate direct literary dependence in these texts.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Ibid., 22.

⁸⁰ Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 165-71.

⁸¹ Bautch, *Developments in Genre*.

⁸² Bautch, *Developments in Genre*, 19-20; *contra* Grabbe (*Ezra-Nehemiah*; New York: Routledge, 1998), who disputes that these interpretive practices developed as early as the postexilic period (195).

⁸³ Bautch, *Developments in Genre*, 20.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 22-23.

Fourth, the reformulation and restructuring of earlier forms has the potential to “transform the ritual universe of meaning.” The appropriation of a liturgical text that was part of a ritual speech-act, into a new sort of speech-act, may have a radically transforming affect on the community. Bautch gives an example: “Fishbane credits certain prayers on sacrifice in the rabbinic literature with transforming the sacrificial cult into a ritual of fasting.”⁸⁵ Similarly, whatever function the book of Lamentations performed in the post-587 BCE communities, its appropriation in later texts may have transformed the “ritual universe of meaning” during the restoration efforts and the Diaspora adjustments.⁸⁶

Finally, the texts of this period “provide a window on the historical context in which they arose.” This rather opaque statement reflects the difficulty of dating ancient texts. Does the biblical text provide genuine historical insight into the period, or do we date the text based on previous historical judgments? Each text and prior historical judgment must be assessed on its own merits, and periodically reassessed as new evidence comes to light. Nevertheless, the precise dating of texts is beyond the scope of this study.

Dobbs-Allsopp’s goal in his study of ANE city laments is somewhat similar to Bautch’s.⁸⁷ He attempts to demonstrate generic affinity between the ANE city laments and the Hebrew book of Lamentations, a connection that would span a millennium and a half. He traces through the Hebrew Bible the common generic elements of ANE city laments and communal laments, including structure, motif, theme and theology. He concludes that there is indeed a distinct but related genre of Hebrew city lament, of which Lamentations is the clearest and most complete example.

Hays, Bautch and Dobbs-Allsopp provide criteria for assessing the relationships between literary works of antiquity. Hays is more concerned with content and history, whereas Dobbs-Allsopp and Bautch focus on generic relationships between texts.

IV. THESIS AND STRUCTURE

⁸⁵ Ibid., 22-23; cited from M. Fishbane, *The Exegetical Imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 4.

⁸⁶ Willey (*Remember the Former Things*) cleverly adapts her title from the paradoxical phrase in Second Isaiah in order to demonstrate the tension inherent in scriptural intertextuality. On the one hand, the prophet appeals to ancient tradition, urging his exilic audience to “remember the former things of old” (Isa 46:9). But the deliverance at hand will be so great, the prophet also says, that there will be no need to remember the past with its failures and suffering (“Remember not the former things,” 43:18).

⁸⁷ Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*.

The goal of this study is to explore the possibility of a relationship of the formative rhetorical function of Lamentations within the Persian-period Yahwistic communities, and the restoration programs of the same period. The specific thesis is that Lamentations is structured in such a way as to allow and encourage the continued unity of the various Yahwistic communities: the *golah* (Babylonian exile) community, the *she'erit* (left in Judah) community, and the refugee (in Egypt and elsewhere) communities. This rhetorical function was one reason (among several) that Lamentations was recognized and revered as scripture. Eventually, Lamentations came to be read not as a time-bound record of a single event, but as a timeless expression of suffering and pain.

The next chapter examines what is known from the historical record about the Yahwistic religious communities that developed after the events of 587 BCE: the Babylonian *golah* community, the Judean community (by analogy, referred to as the *she'erit* community), and a distinct Egyptian community. What were the commonalities and distinctives of these religious groups?

Chapter three explores the background of Lamentations as a lament in the Hebrew Bible and as a city lament in the ANE. What are the features/purposes/goals/uses of this sort of literature? Were these laments used in liturgy? How did they shape collective identity?

Chapter four features a careful examination of the text of Lamentations. Which portions of the text are oriented toward one community over the others? Which features make the lament “portable,” i.e., amenable to use in either sort of community? Which features give Lamentations its “timelessness” and resilience as liturgy and rhetoric?

Chapter five explores possible intertextual relationships between Lamentations and other Persian-period texts. How do the various visions of community restoration treat the different Yahwistic communities that came in conflict during this period?

Chapter six summarizes the findings and suggests areas for further study.

CHAPTER 2

FRAGMENTATION OF JUDAH

I. INTRODUCTION

According to 2 Kings 24:11-17, the initial fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 598 BCE resulted in a permanent split within the people of Judah. Many of the elites of Jerusalem were carried off into exile, while a few peasants (דלת עם הארץ) were left to work the land. In 587 BCE, following the rebellion of Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar's vassal, a more complete destruction took place, and many more of the inhabitants were taken to Babylon, leaving the land empty except for a few peasants (2 Kgs 25:11-12).

Yet archaeological findings present a more complex picture of this period than this biblical narrative presents. It appears that a great many of the working-class Judahites were left in the land, and that only a few thousand from the upper classes and royalty were taken to Babylon. In addition to the *she'erit* community (those left in the land), some natives of Judah had fled the country and lived as refugees in Moab, Ammon and Edom (Jer 40:11). There is also evidence of Judahite refugees in Egypt (Jer 24:8; 40-44).

The worship of YHWH within Judah and Israel throughout the period of the divided monarchy was pluriform, as both the biblical narratives and the archaeological records attest. Despite attempts by those of the "orthodox" perspective (e.g., Josiah in 2 Kgs 22-23) to centralize worship in Jerusalem, worship of YHWH and other deities persisted at other holy sites and on local "high places." With the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE, the centralizing influences were essentially silenced, and distinct expressions of Yahwism developed separately—a situation that continued throughout the templeless and second-temple periods.

Goals and Methods

This chapter will examine what may be and is known from the historical record concerning the life and practice of the Yahwistic communities as they developed separately after the events of 587 BCE: the *golah* community in Babylon; the Judean *she'erit* community; the Diaspora community that remained in Babylon; and the refugees to the areas surrounding Judah; and the Egyptian Diaspora community. Special attention will be given to

the religious and cultural distinctives of the communities, as well as the attitudes of the communities toward each other.

The first section will examine the biblical texts as historical sources, and the second will synthesize the biblical portrayals with the archaeological and external documentary evidence to present a picture of each community.

The historical data have been divided into biblical and non-biblical sources. Some might object that such a division privileges the biblical sources over other historical sources. The material is divided thus for several reasons. First, many of the biblical writings differ significantly in style and purpose from other literary data, and thus can be treated more conveniently together.

Second, the biblical writings, each having its own specific purpose, are still associated into a single broad category according to common language and later canonical status in the community; i.e., these are Hebrew texts that a religious community has revered together for various reasons.

Third, this study is conducted with the supposition that the biblical texts are broadly historically reliable because they preserve in a *single* canon a diversity of perspectives, providing us a window into the beliefs of the period. The question of which books were canonical, when, and in which stage of development, is quite complex, even when examining a single literary unit. But the Hebrew Bible is mostly a Persian-period document containing competing ideological material in all three sections. Each text has a different ideological angle and theological purpose (or several perspectives). The coexistence of the DtrH and Chronicles, of D and P in the Pentateuch, of Ezekiel 40-48 and Isaiah 56-66 in the Prophets, and of Esther and Nehemiah in the Writings, indicates that this canon was balanced to a certain degree, in order to appeal to a spectrum of beliefs and communities. With many axes to grind, the diversity of the canon lends more easily to historical credibility as do other biased works of antiquity.

II. CANONICAL SOURCES

Narrative Texts

2 Kings

The book of Kings, as the conclusion of the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH), has been the subject of much debate. Since Noth's postulation of a unified DtrH ending on a "low

note,”¹ other scholars have tried to explain the tension between the Davidic promise (2 Sam 7) and the fulfillment of the curses of Deuteronomy.² Some date the book’s final form early in the Babylonian period;³ others place the final form in the Persian period.

The key sections that address the identity and religion of the post-587 BCE Yahwistic sects are 2 Kings 17 and 24-25. Whether Deuteronomism is ascribed to traditionalist “people of the land” in the divided Monarchic period,⁴ a group of pro-Jehoiachin scribes in Babylon,⁵ or a Jerusalem sect in the postexile,⁶ or to all of these groups in part, the deportation texts in 2 Kings provide a window into Judahite perception of the relationship between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, and the *golah* and *she’erit* communities.

According to 2 Kings 17, Israel under Hoshea was conquered by Shalmaneser of Assyria (722 BCE). The inhabitants of Samaria were removed to Halah and Media (17:6), and Samaria was repopulated with people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim (17:24). Note that verse seven only mentions explicitly the inhabitants of the city of Samaria, which had held out under siege for three years after Assyria’s invasion of “the whole land” (v 5). However, verse 24 clarifies that Assyria repopulated “Samaria and its cities,” indicating that *all* the inhabitants of the Samarian kingdom were removed (as stated in 23b: “So Israel was exiled from its land to Assyria to this very day”). The non-Israelite peoples adopted a syncretistic form of Yahwism, taught to them by an Israelite priest at Bethel (vv 25-34, 41).

This passage provides a Southern view of the Northern post-722 BCE inhabitants. Interestingly, ethnicity does not seem to be the primary concern here; Dtr acknowledges these non-Israelites as Yahwists in some sense who nevertheless worshiped YHWH unacceptably:

¹ Thomas C. Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 21-25.

² See Gary N. Knoppers and J. Gordon McConville, eds., *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2000). H.W. Wolff (“The Kerygma of the Deuteronomistic Historical Work,” 62-78) noted the hopeful message of the DtrH centered on the Davidic promise; Frank M. Cross (“The Themes of the Book of Deuteronomy and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History,” 79-94) distinguished two Dtr redactions: a hopeful Dtr1 during the Josianic reforms, and a despondent Dtr2 in the exile.

³ Serge Frolov, “Evil-Merodach and the Deuteronomist: The Sociohistorical Setting of Dtr in the Light of 2 Kgs 25,27-30,” *Biblica* 88 (2007): 174-90.

⁴ Christopher Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 61-71.

⁵ Frolov, “Evil-Merodach and the Deuteronomist,” 183-89.

⁶ Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*.

alongside other deities, and at sites other than Jerusalem.⁷ Presumably some loyal Yahwists took refuge in the South and were integrated into Judah (cf. 2 Chr 15:9).⁸ Regardless of the final date and setting of DtrH, it is clear that this view of the post-722 BCE Samaritans continues in Judah through the exilic period and into the Persian period.

2 Kings 24-25 describes the fall of Judah to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Demographic changes in Judah include two stages of forced deportation over eleven years (24:10-17, 598 BCE; 25:8-12, 587 BCE), small territorial losses to smaller peoples (24:2), the complete loss of Judah to Nebuchadnezzar, and the emigration of some Judahites to Egypt (25:26).

The summary statement in 25:21b, “So Judah was exiled from its land,” corresponds nearly verbatim to the statement of Israel’s exile 17:23b. Whereas Dtr is similarly adamant that Israel is completely removed from its land, 25:12 and 25:22-26 acknowledge some Judahites left in the land. This allows the reader warrant to doubt the earlier contention that ethnic Israelites were completely removed from Samaria.

In any case, the ethnic demography of the territories formerly under the hegemonies of Jerusalem and Samaria after the invasions does not seem to be Dtr’s primary concern. The problems leading to the downfall of both kingdoms were religious: syncretism and non-centralized worship. The moral failure of both the Northern and Southern kings resulted in judgment from YHWH, and the people suffered the consequences. At the end of Kings, the people of Israel and Judah are just as needy, oppressed and divided—if not more so—than they were prior to the rise of the Davidic dynasty.

Seitz’s reconstruction of the composition of Judah during this period is representative of the thesis that there existed a tension between the Jerusalem nobility and “the people of the land” (עַם הָאָרֶץ). The people of the land (*`am ha'ares*), in this view, are rural natives of Judah and refugees from Israel who are connected with “early traditions and traditionalists of Deuteronomy.”⁹ The *`am ha'ares* “actively engaged in dynastic affairs”¹⁰ from time to time,

⁷ Iain Provan remarks, “Identification of these polytheistic inhabitants of Samaria as the ancestors of the Samaritans of the postexilic periods is a later polemic” (“2 Kings,” in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible [NOAB]*, Michael D. Coogan, ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 561.

⁸ This explains the presence of strongly pro-Judah and lesser pro-Northern strains in the DtrH, especially Judges. Judges values the primacy of Judah (Judg 1:2, 19) and points to the needs for a Judahite-king (David), but also values the inclusion of Benjamin (Judg 20-21) and the leadership of the prominent Northern clans (Deborah, Barak, Gideon, Samson, etc.).

⁹ Seitz, *Theology in Conflict*, 69.

including the overthrow of Athaliah (2 Kgs 11) and Amon (2 Kgs 21:24). The nature of the conflict with the Jerusalem nobility is epitomized in their preference for Josiah over his grandfather, Manasseh, or father, Amon:

Holding to the tone of early Dtr traditions, [the people of the land] sought a king who would maintain the kind of rigorous independence permitted even vassal-states, rather than the kind of religious and political wavering evidenced for the reign of Manasseh. . . . The sharp religious force of Deuteronomy could be translated into military/political action when and if the circumstances allowed.¹¹

This would partly explain Dtr's condemnation of Manasseh as an appeaser, as well as the favorable portrayal of Josiah as a reformer and holy warrior against Neco of Egypt. The conflict between views intensified after Sennacherib's invasion of Judah and the later incursions by the Babylonians and others (2 Kgs 24:2), during which many rural Judahites took refuge within Jerusalem.

Seitz's reconstruction is a plausible explanation for several phenomena in the biblical texts. First, it explains much of the political conflict at certain key points in Judah's history. Second, it accounts for the presence of Northern traditions in DtrH. Third, it accounts for similarities in attitude and content between Deuteronomy and Jeremiah, since Jeremiah himself had a background similar to that of the *'am ha'areš*. He was a refugee to Jerusalem, and he accepted YHWH's judgment for sin through the instrument of Babylon, over-against the faithless "monarchy" of Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah.¹²

Ezra-Nehemiah

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah contain the most prominent narrative accounts of the returns from exile. There is debate over whether these books should be considered a single work or separate books. The books contain numerous parallels in content and structure; these could point either to comparison as separate works, or to unity. Grabbe considers both approaches valid; the books are a unity, but an editorial unity that does not always exhibit

¹⁰ Ibid., 67.

¹¹ Ibid., 68.

¹² Ibid., 69-71.

exceptional skill.¹³ This study will assume the unity of Ezra-Nehemiah, while acknowledging and addressing the editorial seams in what is apparently a collection of several traditions.

The final editorial shape of Ezra-Nehemiah is theologically oriented. Nevertheless, included in that theological agenda is at least the pretense of presenting genuine historical data. The genealogical lists, the correspondence with the kings of Persia, and the detailed first-person accounts all point to a desire to write history in some sense. Connection to the past, whether perceived or actual, is crucial to Ezra-Nehemiah, which casts the return as a fulfillment of previous traditions such as the prophecies of Jeremiah (Ezra 1:1) and the exodus event.¹⁴

Ezra-Nehemiah is written from a *golah* perspective. Each of the four restoration efforts begins in the Persian east and proceeds to Judah. Moreover, the antagonists in Ezra-Nehemiah are typically the existing inhabitants of Judah and the surrounding regions.

Restoration Effort	Leadership	Starting Location	Primary Concern
Ezra 1	Sheshbazzar	Babylon (Ezra 1:5-11)	Temple articles
Ezra 2-3 (Ezra 4-6)	Zerubbabel, Jeshua (Peoples of the Land)	Babylon (Ezra 2:1-2)	Temple building Opposition to <i>golah</i> community
Ezra 7-10	Ezra	Babylon (Ezra 7:6)	Torah; religious purity
Neh 1-13	Nehemiah	Susa (Neh 1:1-3)	Jerusalem walls; religious purity

The genealogical list in Ezra 2 is parallel to Nehemiah 7:6-73 and is probably intended to include the returnees of the later three stages of return (Zerubbabel et al., Ezra and Nehemiah). Eskenazi explains two purposes for the repetition:

First, it connects the last stage of reconstruction with the successful efforts of the previous generations, as a continuous response to Cyrus's original decree (Ezra 1). By repeating the list from Ezra 2, Ezra-Nehemiah frames and melds the three stages of return and reconstruction (Temple, community, city) into a single, unified event, spanning nearly a century (538-444

¹³ Lester L. Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 2.

¹⁴ J. Gordon McConville, "Ezra-Nehemiah and the Fulfillment of Prophecy," *VT* 36 (1986): 205-24. Cf. K. Koch, "Ezra and the Origins of Judaism," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 19 (1974): 173-97.

BCE). Second, it identifies who now legitimately belongs to the community and is subject to the legal and religious practices, privileges, and responsibilities that follow.¹⁵

Interestingly, Ezra 2:1 (Neh 7:6) says that they returned “to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own city.” Some of the towns listed in 2:2-35 had historically been part of the Northern Kingdom based in Samaria: Bethel, Ono and Hadid. These families may have originally been members of the NK who migrated south after the Assyrian invasion. Among the returnees were some who had been given foreign names: Mordecai and Bigvai.¹⁶ These names may reflect the cultural influence of exile upon the *golah* community in the east, or they may have been incorporated into the *golah* community in Judah over time.¹⁷

The second phase of the return (Zerubbabel and Jeshua) is strictly a *golah*-community enterprise. Part of the motivation for the rebuilding of the temple is “dread of the peoples of the lands” (עמי הארצות 3:3). These peoples are called the “adversaries” of Judah and Benjamin (4:1), and they claim to have been sacrificing to the God of Judah since “Esarhaddon king of Assyria” brought them to Samaria (4:1-3). According to the (much later) letter sent to Artaxerxes by the opponents of the *golah* community, “Osnappar” (Ashurbanipal of Assyria¹⁸) had resettled the people of Persia, Erech, Babylon, Susa and Elam in the Samarian cities and elsewhere in the province Beyond-the-River (4:8-10).

Even though the temple rebuilding is a *golah* project, some from the *she'erit* communities are permitted join the *golah* community by “separating themselves from the pollutions of the nations of the land” (מטמאת גוי-הארץ 6:21). The coincidence with the celebration of the Passover as Israel’s founding event signals the unification of a new Israel.

The third phase of the return, led by Ezra, focuses on ethnic and religious purity. Returning from Babylon with the Torah (7:6-10), Ezra sets about establishing priestly and Levitical authority (Ezra 8) and purity (Ezra 9-10). His immediate concern is intermarriage between the “holy seed” and the “peoples of the lands” (9:2). He conflates the prohibitions of Deuteronomy 7:1-5 and 23:3-8, which he interprets as applying to intermarriage with any

¹⁵ Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, *NOAB*, 696.

¹⁶ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 84

¹⁷ Eskenazi, *NOAB*, 674.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 676.

foreigner.¹⁹ The matrilineal principle—the determination of community status through the mother—had apparently taken hold during the exilic period.²⁰

Ezra's overarching concern is *religious* purity, of which ethnic separation is only one manifestation. In his prayer of confession (9:5-15) he compares the restoration efforts to the exodus and conquest narratives, and the current peoples of the land to the Canaanites of old. The disgust for the Canaanites stems from their supposed abominable practices (תעבנות vv 11, 14).

Both penitential prayers recorded in Nehemiah (1:5-11, 9:5-38) likewise draw comparisons between the restoration and the exodus/conquest. While these prayers do not mention the abominable practices of the nations, they make another point about Israel's relation to other peoples: cohabitation with and domination by other nations is Israel's punishment for disobedience (1:8; 9:27-28, 30, 36-37). Therefore, freedom and separation from the nations is both a reason for and a sign of YHWH's favor restored (1:9; 9:7, 11, 24, 27-28).

Nehemiah's phase of the return was primarily a *golah* project, though some of the *she'erit* community participated. Nehemiah excludes Tobiah, who is called an "Ammonite" and said to have "no claim in Jerusalem" (2:20), though he has a Yahwistic theophoric name. Sanballat, Nehemiah's other main antagonist, is affiliated with the "army of Samaria" (4:2). The main workers on the walls were returnees, inhabitants of Jerusalem and its surrounding villages.

In Nehemiah 5, Nehemiah responds to the complaint of the rural poor: the rebuilding project combined with exorbitant taxes imposed by the Jewish nobility was draining their labor and means of support. These rural poor could be *golah* people from a previous return, or perhaps also some of the *she'erit* who joined themselves to the *golah* community in

¹⁹ Benjamin D. Giffone, "'Your Mama Was a Hittite': Torah Exegesis and the Matrilineal Principal in the Ezraite Reforms" (Paper for the Eastern regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, March 26, 2010), 2-3.

²⁰ Lawrence Schiffman (*From Text to Tradition*; Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1991), argues that matrilineal principle originated in the exilic period: "Already in this period the law that Jewish identity is determined through the mother was operative. The biblical narrative singles out the families in which the mother was not Jewish, for such unions led to the birth of non-Jewish children" (39). However, this interpretation is disputed: cf. Shaye J.D. Cohen, "The Origins of the Matrilineal Principle in Rabbinic Law," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 10 (1985): 19-53. Perhaps only foreign wives were targeted because Jewish women who had married foreign men were beyond Ezra's jurisdiction.

Zerubbabel's day (Ezra 6:21). It seems that the rural inhabitants of Yehud were considered full participants in the religion and society by this time (Neh 5:1-19; 7:73-8:1; 8:14-15; 11:25-36; 12:28-29, 44).

Nehemiah is suspicious of trade with the Tyrians insofar as it incited the Judahites to break the Sabbath (13:15-22). Like Ezra, he condemns and discourages Judahite intermarriage with the Ammonites, Moabites and Ashdodites (13:1-8, 23-29).

Ezra-Nehemiah's concerns regarding the divergent Yahwistic communities can be summarized as follows:

- The *golah* enterprise is initiated by YHWH in his exercise of sovereignty over the Persian kings.
- Restoration is a new exodus/conquest; therefore, separation from nations that could drag Israel back into the sins that caused the exile is of utmost importance.
- The *golah* community preserved the traditions of true Yahwism during the Babylonian and Persian periods. Those who worshiped YHWH in Samaria, Ammon and elsewhere were not legitimate members of the community.
- Members of the *she'erit* community could join the new *golah*-led society by separating themselves from the nations.
- Members of the reestablished priestly cult needed to prove purity of descent; therefore, *she'erit* were excluded. Purity of descent connected this cult to an idealized past.

Chronicles

Chronicles contains only a few explicit references to events of the Persian period. However, the text was almost certainly compiled during the late Persian period or the early Hellenistic period. By comparing Scripture (the DtrH) with the re-written Scripture, we can discern the goals of the Chronicler vis-à-vis the different groups of the Persian period.

Chronicles begins with a series of genealogies, exhibiting a concern for origins and ethnic background. The narrative of Chronicles begins with the death of Saul and the rise of David (1 Chr 10), and ends with the fall of Jerusalem (2 Chr 36). The postscript (2 Chr 36:22-23) is the decree of Cyrus, which links Chronicles to the restoration endeavors recorded in Ezra-Nehemiah.

The genealogies (1 Chr 1-9) exhibit concentrically narrowing spheres of concern: beginning with all nations descending from Adam and Noah (1 Chr 1), then Jacob (2:1-2), Judah (2:3-4:23) and David (3:1-24). Chapter 4 concludes with the descendents of Simeon (4:24-43). Chapter 5 numbers the Transjordan tribes (Reuben, Gad, Half-Manasseh). Chapter 6 follows the descendents of Levi, with the Aaronide priesthood at the fore (6:1-15). Chapter 7 numbers six other tribes: Issachar, Benjamin, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim and Asher. Chapter 8 numbers Benjamin in further detail. Chapter 9 lists the *golah* families of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, Manasseh and Levi who returned to Jerusalem in the Persian period.

There are three points to make about these genealogies relative to Persian-period communities. First, the Chronicler is focused on Judah, Benjamin, Levi and David, devoting the broadest (in terms of branches on the family tree) and most comprehensive (in number of generations included) coverage to these families. Second, the Chronicler is also concerned to number “all Israel;” even though the Southern tribes are favored, the Northern tribes are included, even in the return efforts (9:3). The Chronicler takes care to make the number of tribes add up to twelve, even if some tribes are counted repeatedly (Joseph: Half-Manasseh, Manasseh, and Ephraim) and some are left out (Dan, Zebulun).

Third, in the Chronicler’s interpretation of oral and written genealogies, the identity of Israel is partly determined by possession of the land, particularly the land of Judah.²¹ Willi argues that the naturalization of Caleb the Kenizzite (Num 32:12; Josh 14:6-14) into the citizenry of Judah indicates “the Chronicler’s inclusive view of Judah.”²² Caleb is “made” a son of Hezron (2:18 contra 2:9) because the actual Hezronites settled in Gilead, whereas Caleb, a foreigner by birth, filled the “settlement-vacuum” in Bethlehem and favored Judah.²³

The narratives of Chronicles differ from those of DtrH in several ways that are relevant to this study. First, the Chronicler focuses on the SK much more heavily than on the NK, but still considers the NK part of “all Israel.”²⁴ Second, Chronicles whitewashes David’s record, only recording the sin of the census (1 Chr 21; cf 2 Sam 24). The Chronicler casts thus casts David as penitent. Third, the Chronicler likewise shifts the blame for the fall of Judah

²¹ Thomas Willi, “Late Persian Judaism and its Conception of an Integral Israel According to Chronicles: Some Observations on Form and Function of the Genealogy of Judah in 1 Chronicles 2.3-4.23,” in Tamara C. Eskenazi and Kent H. Richards, eds., *Second Temple Studies 2. Temple Community in the Persian Period* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 157.

²² *Ibid.*, 159.

²³ *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁴ כל ישראל (“all Israel”) occurs 46 times in 1-2 Chronicles.

away from (King) Manasseh by casting him as a penitent sinner (2 Chr 33:10-13) like his ancestor, David. The Babylonian exile is attributed to the collective unfaithfulness of Judah (1 Chr 9:1; 2 Chr 36:14-16) and the necessity of Sabbath rest for the land itself (2 Chr 36:21).

The book of Chronicles is scripture re-written idealistically and ideologically in support of the postexilic Yehud community. The Chronicler, like Ezra-Nehemiah, believes that repentance will result in the return of YHWH's favor, marked by a return to prosperity in Palestine and the restored temple cult. Whereas Ezra-Nehemiah is suspicious of the Samaritan and Judahite *she'erit*, the Chronicler seems to be more favorable toward the Northern tribes, including them in the genealogies (1 Chr 4-5; 7) and incorporating refugees into the SK (1 Chr 9:3, 12:1-40; 2 Chr 15:9, 30:11-13).²⁵

The Chronicler idealizes the monarchy as the formative agent of Israel's traditions:

By placing David and Solomon's achievements at the center of Israelite history, the author underscores the prominence of those Israelite institutions he believed developed, were consolidated, or were transformed during this period—the priesthood, descended from Aaron; the Levites in all their responsibilities as singers, teachers, administrators, and ancillaries to the priests; the Davidic dynasty; and, last but not least, the Temple itself. Having set the establishment of Israel's normative political and religious institutions in the time of David and Solomon, the Chronicler never reneges on their pertinence to the lives of all Israelites in later centuries.²⁶

The task for Persian-period Judah, according to the Chronicler, is to be a penitent people after David and Manasseh. The Chronicler's hope is that Judah—once the leading tribe in an “integral Israel” whose parts were “scattered, lost and had disappeared”—would once again “correspond to that Israel that, according to the citizenship-lists, had been in the beginning.”²⁷ For the Chronicler, the Achaemenid monarchy (beginning with Cyrus in 2 Chr 36:22-23) fulfills YHWH's purpose, just as David and Solomon had: Israel's continuing existence as YHWH's people.

²⁵ Gary N. Knoppers (*NOAB*) writes, “Throughout his presentation, the Chronicler exhibits a concern for all Israelite tribes. The Chronicler criticizes the Northern Kingdom and its monarchs, but he still considers the northern tribes as Israelite and shows a sustained interest in their contacts with Judah” (619).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 577.

²⁷ Willi, “Late Persian Judaism,” 161.

Prophetic Texts

Jeremiah

The complex textual history of the book of Jeremiah as demonstrated in the differences between the LXX and MT versions of the book is itself a remarkable datum in the historical reconstruction of the exilic and postexilic Judahite communities. LXX Jeremiah is about one-eighth shorter than MT Jeremiah, and places the Oracles Against the Nations (OAN) together after 25:14, with the oracle against Moab occurring last, rather than the oracle against Babylon.²⁸

The differences between LXX and MT Jeremiah likely result from the development of the traditions in the Egyptian communities (*Vorlage* of the LXX) and the Babylonian exile (Proto-MT). Remarkably, fragments of both textual traditions are preserved at Qumran.²⁹ Most scholars agree that the LXX reflects an earlier tradition than the MT tradition. Both versions will be considered for the present study.³⁰ References will be from the MT, with significant differences in the LXX noted as appropriate.

Jeremiah prophesied in the royal court of Judah prior to the fall of Jerusalem, among the *she'erit* at Mizpah until 582 BCE (40:6), and from then on at Tahpanhes in Egypt (43:5-8).

Jeremiah acknowledges the fall of Jerusalem as the just punishment for idolatry. But he envisions a future for a regathered people (32:37) after a seventy-year period of captivity (25:11-12; 29:10). To that end, he supports Gedaliah's quiescence to Nebuchadnezzar in remaining in the land of Judah (40:9-10; 42:8-22). Jeremiah envisions a restoration of the Davidic monarchy (23:5; 33:15), but not for Jehoiakim and his offspring (36:30).

During Nebuchadnezzar's attacks on Jerusalem in 598 and 587 BCE, many Judahites had fled as refugees to Moab, Ammon and Edom; these began to return after the land

²⁸ J. Daniel Hays, "Jeremiah, the Septuagint, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Inerrancy: Just What Exactly Do We Mean by the 'Original Autographs?'" 133-49 in Vincent Bacote, ed., *Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

²⁹ Mark E. Biddle, *NOAB*, 1074.

³⁰ I must express my gratitude to Gary E. Schnittjer for sharing with me a working document displaying in parallel format the English translations of the LXX (2007: New English Translation of the Septuagint) and MT (1989: New Revised Standard Version), as well as Qumran mss. (Martin Abegg, Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible: The Oldest Known Bible Translated for the First Time into English*; Harper: San Francisco, 1999).

stabilized under Gedaliah's leadership at Mizpah (40:11-12). Interestingly, worship continued at the site of the Jerusalem temple even after its destruction (41:5).

The peace was short-lived, however; Ishmael son of Nethaniah, a member of the royal family (2 Kgs 25:25), assassinated Gedaliah with the support of the king of Ammon (40:13-41:3). Johanan son of Kareah and his pro-Gedaliah forces then defeated Ishmael's army, though Ishmael escaped to Ammon (41:11-18). But Johanan and the *she'erit* feared reprisal from Babylon (41:18), so they disobeyed Jeremiah's injunction to stay in Judah (42:7-22), and took all the Mizpah community to Egypt (43:1-7), settling in Migdol, Tahpanhes, Memphis and the land of Pathros (44:1).

Jeremiah condemns the Judahites for non-Yahwistic worship, both before the escape to Egypt (7:16-18; 8:19; 10:1-25; 16:17-21; etc.) and after (44:1-30). Particularly pervasive was the cult of the "queen of heaven," possibly a fertility cult of the goddess 'Asherah.³¹ A large group of Judahites in Pathros resumed this cult, blaming the fall of Jerusalem on their negligence of this deity (44:18).

Ezekiel

Ezekiel is a *golah* prophet, taken to Babylon after the fall of Jehoiachin's Jerusalem in 598 BCE (Ezek 1:2-3).³² However, he addresses the situation of both the *golah* and *she'erit* communities, since he views them as unified with a single fate.³³

For Ezekiel, the fall of Jerusalem in 598 BCE is irreversible in the short-term.³⁴ There is no hope in Zedekiah, to whom Ezekiel never refers as "king."³⁵ Nebuchadnezzar is the "king of kings" (26:7) who is the agent of YHWH's judgment (21:31; 29:19; 30:24; 32:11). After a period of punishment, however, Babylon will be judged (38-39). Some passages are indicative of a Davidic hope (34:23-24; 37:24-25), whereas the vision of the restored Jerusalem (40-48) has an elaborate temple cult but no king—only a "prince" (נשיא) who is subordinate to the priests (45:17; 46:10).³⁶

³¹ Jill Middlemas, *The Templeless Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 21.

³² Seitz, *Theology in Conflict*, 121.

³³ Steven L. Cook, *NOAB*, 1180.

³⁴ Seitz, *Theology in Conflict*, 103.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 122. Seitz demonstrates that Ezekiel's view of monarchic succession favored Jehoiakim and his son Jehoiachin, over-against the choices of the *'am ha'ares*—Jehoahaz—and of Babylon—Zedekiah (143).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

Ezekiel perceives the exile as similar to Israel's forty-year wandering in the wilderness (20:36).³⁷ Like the second generation coming out of the desert to take the Promised Land, Israel will be raised from the dead (37:1-14), and the NK and SK will be reunited (37:15-28). The regathering of the scattered Judahites and Israelites from the exile/Diaspora to Palestine is a key element of this restoration (11:17; 20:34; 28:25; 39:25-29; etc.).

In 1:4-28, Ezekiel envisions a mobile presence of YHWH (symbolized by wheels: 1:15-21) which can travel outside the Jerusalem sanctuary into exile with Zion. For Ezekiel, ritual purity of both the priests and the people (40-48) is an essential step toward the ideal situation of YHWH's presence restored to the temple (43:1-12). Purity involves the exclusion of foreigners and the uncircumcised from the temple (44:5-9), and equal apportionment of the land to the resettled tribes (48:1-35). However, the "resident aliens" (גרים) and "those who have begotten children in your midst" (אשר הולדו בנים בתוככם) are permitted to settle and receive an inheritance alongside Israel (47:21-23).

Isaiah 40-55

Deutero-Isaiah was written during the rise of Cyrus of Persia but before the fall of Babylon (c. 545-539 BCE). A majority of scholars situate Deutero-Isaiah in Babylon, though the affinity of Isaiah 49-54 with Lamentations may indicate a *she'erit* situation.³⁸ The poet envisions an integral restoration of the *golah*, *she'erit* and refugee communities. The important themes are trust in YHWH's sovereignty despite Judah's current state of captivity, the restoration of the community to Judah, and YHWH's forgiveness of the sins that led to the exile.

It has been noted that Isaiah 40-55 "democratizes" the Davidic role and extends special election to all YHWH's people.³⁹ Cyrus is the "messiah" (45:1), YHWH's instrument to allow the *golah* peoples to return (41:25; 45:13). YHWH's relationship to the people is mediated not by a king but by the Servant.⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid., 129.

³⁸ Middlemas, *The Templeless Age*, 96-97.

³⁹ This idea centers around Isa 55:3-5; see Middlemas, *The Templeless Age*, 110; Patricia Tull Willey, *Remember the Former Things: The Recollection of Previous Texts in Second Isaiah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 26-27.

⁴⁰ A detailed examination of the identity or identities of the "Servant" in Deutero-Isaiah is not particularly relevant to this study. It must suffice to note that the term "Servant" may have several different

Deutero-Isaiah's message of hope extends to all Israel (41:8; 46:3), inclusive of the former NK and SK. Daughter Zion is a metaphor for both the *golah* community in Babylon (48:20-21) and the afflicted *she'erit* community in Jerusalem (51:17-23; 52:7-9). The plight of the *golah* community is slavery, and the prophet therefore maps a new exodus through the desert (43:16ff; 48:20-21; 51:10; 52:4-5). The *she'erit* community and the land itself suffer death (51:17-23), so the prophet envisions new life for Jerusalem (49:8-10) and her children (49:19-21; 52:7-9; 54:1-17). Israel will be gathered from all points of the compass (43:5-7; 49:8-12; 54:7), including the refugees to Egypt (49:12).⁴¹

Deutero-Isaiah emphasizes the sovereignty of YHWH over all the nations, who worship worthless idols (41:21-29; 44:9-20). The prophet is especially harsh toward Babylon, who will suffer the fate it imposed on Judah and other nations (45:20-47:15). Deutero-Isaiah's restoration vision involves the conversion and inclusion of Gentiles who will worship YHWH (42:6; 49:6; 55:5).

Haggai

The short book of Haggai has a relatively narrow focus: the rebuilding efforts beginning in 520 BCE. Haggai was one of the only prophets who could claim outward success in his mission: the people were responsive to his oracles (1:12-15; 2:10-19).

In Haggai the rebuilding is led by Zerubbabel and Jeshua (1:1, 12,14; 2:2, 4, 21-23). The participants are referred to as “the remnant (שְׁאֵרִית) of the people” (1:12, 14; 2:2) and as “all the people of the land (כָּל־עַם הָאָרֶץ)” (2:4). It is not clear from the text itself whether these are *golah* or *she'erit* people. Unlike the references to the Zerubbabel-Jeshua endeavor in Ezra-Nehemiah, Haggai makes no mention of a return from the east at all—only to the state of the people presently in Yehud. The *act* of rebuilding the temple, rather than a geographical return from captivity, is cast as a new exodus by the exodus/conquest language of 2:4-7 and 2:21-23 (cf. Deut 31:7; Josh 1:6-9; 1 Chr 28:10, 20). Anyone Judahite, irrespective of whether he had been in Babylon, is invited and obligated to participate in this renewal.

Haggai hopes that Zerubbabel, a royal descendent of David, will rule over an independent Judah. Ezra-Nehemiah, with the advantage of a broader historical purview, has

referents in Deutero-Isaiah, and also that the role of the Servant is more conspicuous in the absence of a Davidic figure.

⁴¹ Blenkinsopp and others read סִינַיִם as *Syene* (Gr. Σουηνη; Ancient Egyptian *Swenet*), the Upper Egyptian city near the Jewish settlement at Elephantine (*NOAB*, 1047).

no such hope (though mention of the ongoing state of “slavery” is made in the supplications of Ezra 9:7-9 and Nehemiah 9:36). Like Nehemiah (12-13), Haggai is also concerned with ritual purity of the priests and the people (2:10-14).

Zechariah

Zechariah, the longest book of The Twelve, is divided into two parts: chapters 1-8 (Proto-Zechariah) and chapters 9-14 (Deutero-Zechariah). Proto-Zechariah refers through a series of visions to the rebuilding efforts of 520-18 BCE, and is similar to Haggai. Deutero-Zechariah may date to a later time in the Persian period, or perhaps in the Hellenistic period (“Greece” in 9:13).

Like Haggai, Zechariah supports the leadership of Jeshua (3:1-10; 6:9-14) and Zerubbabel (3:8; 4:6-10). Zechariah’s vision of an independent Israel is expressed in apocalyptic imagery: the world powers will be overturned (1:16, 21; 9:1-11:3; 12:1-9; 14:1-5) and a golden age will come to Israel (8:1-13, 20-23; 9:16-17; 14:6-11, 16-21).

Zechariah laments the scattering and division of Israel. In 1:18-2:5 he sees the horns that have “scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem,” and envisions a regathering that will make Jerusalem so populous that it will have no walls—only YHWH to protect it. He encourages the Diaspora population to flee Babylon and return to Yehud (2:6-12; 5:5-11; 6:15), and promises salvation from “land of the east and the land of the west” (8:7), and later, from Egypt and Assyria (10:10-11). Refugee status in Egypt is equated with the Babylonian captivity. Tribes of the NK are part of this restored community with Judah around Jerusalem (“Israel” in 1:19, 8:13, “Bethel” in 7:2; “Ephraim” in 9:13, 10:7; “Joseph” in 10:6).

Like some of the preexilic prophets such as Proto-Isaiah, Zechariah’s vision of the golden age is damning of all Gentile nations save Persia (Babylon in 2:7, 5:5-11; Aram/Damascus in 9:1; Phoenicia in 9:2-3; Philistia in 9:5-7; Greece in 9:13; Assyria and Egypt in 10:10-12; Egypt and all nations in 14:19; Canaanite traders in 14:21), but inclusive of those who would worship YHWH in Jerusalem (2:11-12; 8:20-23; 14:9, 16-21).

Malachi

Malachi is linked to Deutero-Zechariah by its first word, *massa*’ (“oracle”/“burden”). Zechariah 9:1 and 12:1 each begin sections of length roughly equal to that of Malachi. Malachi’s concerns are somewhat similar to those of Zechariah and Haggi, including the purity of the postexilic temple cult (2:10-15; 3:1-5) and the payment of tithes (1:6-14; 3:8-10).

Malachi is pro-temple, but not explicitly pro-*golah* (over-against the *she'erit*). Like Ezra-Nehemiah he is concerned about intermarriage, and compares exogamy to idolatry (2:10-16). The Judahites are said to “all have one father,” YHWH (2:10).

Malachi’s restoration vision involves the sudden entrance of YHWH’s “Messenger” (מלאכי)—perhaps Elijah (4:5-6)—into the temple (3:1-4) to purify it. There is no inclusive vision of the nations streaming to Jerusalem to worship YHWH. Malachi does distinguish between those “authentic” Judahites who “fear YHWH and esteem his name,” and the “wicked” (3:16-18).

Malachi 1 strongly condemns Edom, which allied itself to Babylon against Judah. Edom has been devastated after the rise of Persia—there will be no restoration for them.

Isaiah 56-66

Trito-Isaiah is commonly dated to the late sixth century or early fifth century, during a period of moral decline after the returns led by Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel and Jeshua. The restoration had been much more modest than Deutero-Isaiah anticipated, and the people began to return to non-Yahwistic practices, including worship of Molech and child sacrifice (57:5-13; 65:1-7). The leadership had become corrupt (56:9-12; 58:1-14).

Trito-Isaiah’s vision of restoration involves the repentance of the Judahites in the land, the rebuilding of the destroyed cities (64:10-11) and the gathering of those still in the Diaspora to Jerusalem (56:8; 60:4). There is no sense of tension between the *golah* and the *she'erit*, though the distinction is alluded to in 56:8 (“I will gather to him yet more than those already gathered”). The accusations of idolatry are not leveled at the “people of the land,” or the surrounding peoples, but at all the Judahites together. The prayer of confession (63:7-64:12) emphasizes the current unified state of Israel before God as their father, rather than on descent from Abraham (63:16; 64:8-9).

For Trito-Isaiah, proper worship of YHWH is more important than ethnic background. Foreigners and eunuchs, previously prohibited from the assembly of YHWH (Deut 23:1ff), are permitted based on Torah observance (Isa 56:2-8). The victorious vision, consistent with the earlier Isaianic tradition (e.g., Isa 2; 4:2-4; 42:6; 49:6), is one that includes Gentiles who will come to Jerusalem to worship YHWH (60:3; 66:18-23). The Gentiles also aid the restoration efforts (60:5-7, 10-14), and Judahites will be as priests to the Gentiles (61:5-7). Judahites and Gentiles can equally be children of YHWH by obedience, or “children of transgression, offspring of deceit” (57:4).

Isaiah 63:1-6, like Malachi 1, announces vengeance on Edom for profiting from Babylonian rule.

Court Stories

Jeremiah 29:4-7 establishes a paradigm for Diaspora life during the exile. In this paradigm, Judah was exiled as her just punishment for breaking the covenant with YHWH; therefore, the best thing for Judah to do is accept the punishment, make the best of the situation, and wait for YHWH to do what he has planned. The exiles are told to plant gardens and to build houses, to marry, and to “seek the peace of the city into which I have exiled you, and pray to YHWH on its behalf; because its peace will be your peace” (29:7).

The court stories of Esther and Daniel offer new ways of being Jewish in exile, and later, in Diaspora. Whether these books were completed within the Persian period or in the Hellenistic period,⁴² they preserve memories and ideas that shaped the identity of the Persian Diaspora community.

Esther

The book of Esther likely does not provide much historically accurate detail. There is no corroborating historical evidence that Xerxes of Persia (486-65 BCE)⁴³ married a Jewess, or that a plot to exterminate the Jews was foiled during that period. Esther’s historical value is in its positive portrayal of Diaspora Jewish life, and in the contrasts that can be drawn between the Hebrew and Greek versions of the book. In contrast to Ezra-Nehemiah, which presents the returning *golah* community as the truest expression of Yahwism, MT Esther reflects a Jewish perspective that is content to be an influential minority in a Gentile world.

The Jewish life of Mordecai, Esther and their countrymen is markedly influenced by Gentile culture in several ways. These Jews continue to live voluntarily in the Diaspora over fifty years after Cyrus’s decree permitting them to return to Judah. Mordecai and Esther are both named for foreign deities (Marduk and Ishtar). Esther does not refuse to marry a Gentile (as Judith did), but rather conceals her Jewry at Mordecai’s urging (2:10).⁴⁴ There is no mention of the Torah, and Haman’s false slander in 3:8 (that the Jews “have different laws” from the king’s laws) implies that they kept the laws of the Empire without resistance.

⁴² Grabbe, *History of the Jews and Judaism*, 104; Mary Joan Winn Leith, *NOAB*, 708.

⁴³ Grabbe, *History of the Jews and Judaism*, 290-91.

⁴⁴ W.L. Humphreys, “A Life-Style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel,” *JBL* 92(1991): 211-23.

Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman (3:4) is apparently not a religious issue but one of ethnic pride.⁴⁵

The Jews in the book of Esther are proud, wise and cunning. Mordecai ingratiates himself to the king by foiling an assassination plot. Esther's displays shrewdness in her concealment of her Jewry and her dealings with Haman—who was shrewd himself but let his hatred cloud his judgment—and the king. Together, Esther and Mordecai restore the safety and dignity of the Jews, and even permit them to plunder their enemies. Even “many of the peoples of the earth” (בִּים מֵעַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ 8:17) declare themselves to be Jews (מִתִּיהִדִּים 8:17) for fear of retribution.

But the Jews in Esther are not simply self-interested; implicitly following Jeremiah 29:4-7, they seek the *shalom* of Persia. Humphreys observes that both Haman's plot to exterminate the Jews (3:8-10) and Esther's protest (7:4) are couched in terms of the benefit to the king and his subjects. The king concludes (by implication) that Esther and Mordecai are truly loyal to the throne, and Haman is not. Mordecai's tax plan (10:1-3) replaces the revenue promised by Haman.⁴⁶

MT Esther makes no reference to God and only alludes to prayer (“fasting”: 4:3, 16; 9:31). Yet divine Providence is behind the scenes, moving the characters and events toward the favorable conclusion for the Jews within the framework of Gentile society.

Daniel

Daniel has similar historical difficulties to those of Esther. In its present MT form it is a composite work containing six narratives (1-6), visions (8, 10-12), and a penitential prayer and response (9). Though many of the visions are symbolic of events from the Hellenistic period, it is possible that the narratives contain some historically valuable information about Jews in the Babylonian captivity and Persian Diaspora.

Like Esther and Mordecai, Daniel and his three friends attain high places in foreign courts and work toward the prosperity of the empires. However, Daniel and his colleagues retain significant ties to Judah. Whereas in Esther YHWH's agency is implied, the message of the book of Daniel is explicit: the God of the Jews is sovereign over the nations, their kings and their gods (2:20-23, 47; 4:1-3, 34-37; 6:25-28; etc.).

⁴⁵ Humphreys, “A Life-Style for Diaspora,” 215. Haman is called the “Agagite,” apparently a reference to King Agag of Amalek (1 Sam 15), Israel's perennial antagonist.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

The book begins with a reference to the initial attack on Jerusalem in which Nebuchadnezzar carries off the “vessels of the house of God” to the “treasury of his gods” in Shinar (1:2; 5:3-4). Daniel and his colleagues are given Babylonian theophoric names (1:7).⁴⁷ However, the four Jews refuse to eat the unclean meat and drink (1:8-16). Daniel prays to his God three times daily facing Jerusalem (6:10).

Moreover, the traditions associated with Daniel bear significant affinity to the Ezra-Nehemiah return traditions. Like Ezra-Nehemiah, the book of Daniel contains two “penitential prayers” in which the repentance of the individual is offered on the entire nation’s behalf (Dan 9:1-19; Prayer of Azariah). Like Nehemiah, Daniel hopes from his high position to affect some sort of restoration in Jerusalem (6:10), and prays for the end of the exile as promised in Jeremiah 25:11-14 (Dan 9:2, 24).

Daniel reflects a mediating perspective on Diaspora life somewhere between those of Esther and Ezra-Nehemiah. Jews are called to be faithful in serving foreign kings and “seeking the peace” of the eastern cities in which they live. However, restoration in Jerusalem is still the goal, and Jews are to remain separate and ritually pure until such a time as they may return to Judah.

III. COMMUNITIES

We may speak of two levels of intentionality in explaining the events in Judah, Samaria, Babylon and Egypt leading up to and during Persian period. First, there is a naturalistic, humanistic lens through which we may interpret the decisions of kings, the economics and politics of a particular region or nation-state, or the effects of the natural environment and geography on trade, agriculture and war. Second, human beings attribute cosmic significance to human experiences. The earthquake of 763 BCE,⁴⁸ for example, was attributed not to shifting tectonic plates on the Earth’s crust, but to divine punishment for sin (Amos 1:1; Zech 14:5; cf Isa 5:25).

Lest we think this is merely the case of an unscientific people giving a supernatural explanation for a natural phenomenon, we see also the attribution of divine agency to the actions of self-interested human agents, such as Nebuchadnezzar’s imperial ambitions, or Cyrus’ desire for a peaceful tax-base. From a naturalistic perspective, Nebuchadnezzar and

⁴⁷ Interestingly, Daniel retains his Hebrew name throughout the narratives, whereas his colleagues are hereafter referred to by their Babylonian names.

⁴⁸ Blenkinsopp, *NOAB*, 986.

Cyrus were human agents behaving in ways that our understandings of politics and economics would predict. But from the perspectives of the natives of Yehud and Samaria, Nebuchadnezzar's conquest was YHWH's judgment, and Cyrus' proclamation was a fulfillment of prophecy.

For the purposes of this study, both sorts of explanations for historical phenomena must be considered. The theological interpretation of the exile and the return motivated the production of the canonical literature during that period, including Lamentations. But the naturalistic interpretation of the events of this period allows a reconstruction of the historical events, and provides a factual baseline for the theological interpretation of those events. In short, we must triangulate from perspectives in history to determine *what* ancient writers knew, in order to understand what they *meant* in their construal of events.

This section attempts to synthesize the archaeological and non-canonical literary data with what can be gleaned from the biblical literature concerning the fragmented Judahite communities in the Persian period.

Fragmentation

With a few exceptions, most historians acknowledge the existence of two independent Israelite kingdoms between the tenth and eighth centuries. These kingdoms, ruled from Samaria in the north and Jerusalem in the south, were connected by some similar religious beliefs and practices, as well as a perceived common ancestry. The NK, larger and more fertile than the SK, was more prominent throughout much of its independent existence.⁴⁹

The rise of the Assyrian Empire in the eighth century presents a significant threat to Israel's and Judah's existence. Prior to this time, the main threats to stability were religious and moral, whereas the military threats from the surrounding nations (Philistia, Moab, etc.) never approached dire status.⁵⁰ After the conquest of the NK in 722 BCE and Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in 701 BCE, Judah was forced to rely on Philistine cities and Egypt for aid. During the reigns of Hezekiah and Manasseh, Assyria was occupied with Egypt, and the SK enjoyed partial recovery.⁵¹

However, the crumbling of the Assyrian Empire meant that the SK was no longer beneath the notice of imperial aspirants. In 612 BCE, the Neo-Babylonians under

⁴⁹ Israel Finkelstein and Amihai Mazar, *The Quest For the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel*, Brian B. Schmidt, ed. (Atlanta: SBL, 2007), 116.

⁵⁰ Seitz, *Theology in Conflict*, 16.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 17-19.

Nabopolassar conquered Nineveh, the Assyrian capitol. In the years to follow, Babylon exerted its hegemony over the formerly Assyrian territories, while Egypt tried to take advantage of Assyria's fall and gain back its territory. Nebuchadnezzar, Nabopolassar's son, established the southern boundary of the Babylonian Empire with a victory over the Egyptians at Carchemish in 605 BCE. Jehoiakim of Judah had aligned himself with Egypt and rebelled against Babylon in 601 BCE. In 598 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar responded by capturing and looting Jerusalem, and taking Jehoiachin (Jehoiakim's son and successor during the siege), the royal family and the upper classes to Babylon (2 Kgs 24:10-17). Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle, was set up as a puppet, but he rebelled in 588 BC, so the Babylonians returned and destroyed Jerusalem.⁵² Further deportations occurred after the rebellion against Gedaliah, the Babylonian-appointed governor, in 582 BCE, and many Judahites fled to Egypt.

It appears that there was little change in the demography of Judah between 582 and 539 BCE. Judahites at that time lived in Babylon (*golah*), Judah (*she'erit*), Egypt, Ammon, Moab and Edom. Descendants of the Israelite NK had been deported centuries earlier to various parts of Mesopotamia. Some descendants of NK refugees to Judah were presumably scattered alongside the natives of Judah.

She'erit

The Babylonian invasion decimated the population of Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. Grabbe contends that Jerusalem was "apparently uninhabited through much of the sixth century," but acknowledges that this view is contested.⁵³ Biddle argues that the pilgrims from the north mentioned in Jeremiah 41:5 are evidence of a continued cult at the site of the destroyed temple⁵⁴ (though there is little doubt that the temple was destroyed⁵⁵). There is little debate that in many of the small provincial towns, everyday life continued much the same way as it had been.⁵⁶

⁵² Middlemas, *The Templeless Age*, 10-11.

⁵³ Grabbe, *History of the Jews and Judaism*, 28.

⁵⁴ Biddle, *NOAB*, 1174.

⁵⁵ Oded Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah Under Babylonian Rule* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 113.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

Middlemas summarizes the debate concerning the quality of life in Judah during this period. E. Stern⁵⁷ argues that the *she'erit* community was one of subsistence farming, as evidenced by the widespread devastation. Barstad⁵⁸ and Blenkinsopp⁵⁹ argue that parts of the community, especially north of Jerusalem, returned to stability and relative prosperity. Middlemas remarks that our limited understanding of Babylonian imperial policies or specific actions taken during this period does not lend much aid to a reconstruction of the Babylonian period in Judah. It is unclear whether Babylon pursued a policy of periodic military plundering, or one of demanding annual tribute. The latter would of course lend itself more to stable institutions and trade in the colonial regions than would the former, and there is evidence⁶⁰ that Babylon shifted strategies toward the tribute model in order to “promote loyalty and stability” amid “concerns about Egypt.”⁶¹ This would explain Judah’s cooperating faction under Gedaliah (2 Kgs 25:23-26; Jer 40-41).

Mizpah appears to have been a regional seat of power during the Babylonian and early Persian periods, though the town appears to have been in slow decline throughout the Persian period.⁶² Gedaliah governed from Mizpah under Babylonian rule until his assassination by a royalist uprising apparently based in Ammon (Jer 40:14). The DtrH makes mention of Mizpah as an important administrative and cultic site (Judg 20-21; 1 Sam 7). Some have suggested the possibility of a sanctuary at Bethel, an ancient sacred site near Mizpah.⁶³

Various forms of religious expression existed among the *she'erit*. The Samaritans continued to practice forms of syncretistic Yahwism as they had since the early days of the NK. Some Judahites practiced syncretism with various cults (Isa 57:5-13; 65:1-7), and others, following Jeremiah, practiced monotheism, either at the other cultic sites or at the site of the destroyed temple (Jer 41:5).

⁵⁷ Ephraim Stern, *Archaeology in the Land of the Bible: The Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian Periods 732-332 B.C.E.* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 350.

⁵⁸ H. Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah During the “Exilic” Period* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996).

⁵⁹ Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Age of Exile,” 416-39 in *The Biblical World*, J. Barton, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁶⁰ Jill Middlemas, *The Troubles of Templeless Judah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁶¹ Middlemas, *The Templeless Age*, 16-18.

⁶² Grabbe, *History of the Jews and Judaism*, 24.

⁶³ Middlemas, *The Templeless Age*, 18.

Golah

It is difficult to estimate how many Judahites were taken to Babylon between 598 and 582 BCE. The biblical accounts disagree, but number the exiles between 8,000 and 10,000 (2 Kgs 24:14-16; Jer 52:28-30); these figures may have been incomplete, or may have excluded women and children. Albertz discusses the problems inherent in such a calculation and concludes that about 20,000 men, women and children were taken to Babylon, which would have amounted to about a quarter of the Judahite population at that time.⁶⁴

The *golah* were the elites of Judah and were deported so that they would contribute to the empire and become integrated into society. While there is little specific biblical evidence concerning life in Babylon, other sources confirm that many Judahites lived together in small enclaves, participating in business and trade.⁶⁵ This is consistent with the portrayals in Daniel, Esther and Nehemiah of Jews in public life—though perhaps none ever rose to the position of queen consort.

The trauma of the deportation resulted in social, economic and religious changes for these Judahites. They immediately became an ethnic minority struggling to maintain community identity. Their urban professions now brought them in daily contact with many other ethnicities and religions. For those who refused to syncretize or abandon Yahwism, a set of more portable religious expressions now came to the fore: prayer (Dan 6:10), fasting (Esth 4:16), and a heightened reverence for written scripture. YHWH was conceived of as being omnipresent and having gone into exile with his people (Ezek 1). Though sacrifice was now impossible, ritual purity became even more important (Ezek 40-48; Dan 1). Some held out hope that Israel would someday be reunited in Palestine and the temple cult would be restored.

Ammon, Moab and Edom

Little is known about these Judahite communities. 2 Kings 24:2 records that in the final years of the Judahite monarchy Judah gradually lost territory to “Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites and Ammonites.” After 587 BCE, Ishmael and his followers took refuge in Ammon (Jer 40:14, 41:15), and others lived in the lands of Moab and Edom (Jer 40:11).

⁶⁴ Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.*, David Green, trans. (Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 90.

⁶⁵ Middlemas, *The Templeless Age*, 23.

During the Persian period, one of Nehemiah's chief antagonists is Tobiah the Ammonite, who has a Yahwistic name. This indicates that Judahites had been integrated into Ammonite society.

Egypt

After the overthrow of Gedaliah at Mizpah, some Judahite refugees fled to Egypt (2 Kgs 25:26), despite Jeremiah's warnings (Jer 42). These refugees settled in Tahpahnnes, Migdol, Memphis and Pathros (Jer 43:7; 44:1). Little is known about these refugees prior to the Persian period.⁶⁶ Jeremiah condemns their syncretism (Jer 44, 46:14ff) and that Ezekiel prophesies their doom along with Egypt (Ezek 29-32).

Some of the Elephantine Papyri⁶⁷ dating to the fifth and fourth centuries give us a picture of later Jewish life in Egypt. These Jews lived in a military outpost on the island of Elephantine, which is in the middle of the Nile in southern Egypt. Middlemas observes, "The community claims to have resided in Elephantine prior to the arrival of Cambyses in Egypt in 527."⁶⁸ The Elephantine community appears to have worshiped YHWH, or *yhw*, alongside four other deities, in a temple with a full sacrificial cult.

Middlemas surmises that the religious and social situation for the Judahite refugees to Egypt in the wake of 587 BCE was probably similar to that of the Elephantine community: "relative freedom to govern themselves, to worship which deities they chose, and to maintain the traditions of their ancestors."⁶⁹ According to Jeremiah 44:17-25, the refugees to Egypt worshiped the "queen of heaven," thought to be Asherah, the biblical incarnation of ANE fertility goddess. These Judahites attribute the destruction of 587 BCE to the failure of the nation to worship this goddess as they had in ages past (Jer 44:17-18). Middlemas writes:

The movement to stamp out Asherah worship as one of the unorthodox cults could have taken place during Josiah's reforms (2 Kgs 22-23), but could equally refer to an unspecified period such as during the siege of Jerusalem, when sacrifices would have been offered exclusively to

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶⁷ B. Porten, *Archives From Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); *The Elephantine Papyri in English: Three Millennia of Cross-Cultural Continuity and Change* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); and, "Settlement of the Jews at Elephantine and the Arameans at Syene," 451-70 in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003).

⁶⁸ Middlemas, *The Templeless Age*, 20.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

the main deity of the city, Yahweh. The reaction reveals a theological axiom in which the anger of a neglected deity causes repercussions in the human sphere.⁷⁰

This invites a fascinating comparison with the perspectives of the Prophets and Lamentations. The logic of Lamentations (and Dtr “orthodoxy”) is similar: the spurned deity caused the destruction. The difference is that the Egyptian refugees believed it was neglect of the Asherah cult, whereas Jeremiah and others believed it was failure to pursue the YHWH cult exclusively.

Restoration?

The ideal of a regathering to Judah was apparently a minority view among Judahites. Despite various attempts to reestablish social and religious institutions in Judah, most of the *golah* Judahites remained in the Diaspora for centuries after 539 BCE, as did the descendants of the Egyptian refugees.

Yet it is the minority’s attempt (or multiple attempts) at reunification that dominated the production of exilic and postexilic literature. The conflicts and challenges of the Persian-era Judahites were formative influences that would shape Judaism for centuries afterward.

Yehud and Samaria

During the Persian period, Yehud was a sparsely-populated region—only about 30 per cent of the height of its population—with a small percentage (perhaps 10 per cent) living in and near Jerusalem, but most in rural settlements. The reintegration of the *golah* community appears not to have affected the population much at all.⁷¹

The archaeological record suggests that the city of Samaria was more populous than Judah during the Persian period. The southern (Ephraim) region was “very sparsely populated,” whereas the northern (Manasseh) region shifted its agricultural production toward oil and wine in the mountainous regions.⁷²

Religious belief and practice during this period was pluriform. Returning *golah* orthodoxy is the dominant perspective of the biblical texts from this period, and the *golah* leaders, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Ezra and Nehemiah, tried to impose that orthodoxy on the

⁷⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁷¹ Grabbe, *History of the Jews and Judaism*, 30; see also Charles E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 285ff.

⁷² Grabbe, *History of the Jews and Judaism*, 32-24.

she'erit. Some *she'erit* joined this orthodoxy, while others continued in syncretism. It would be a mistake to consider the *golah* religious prevalence in political affairs of Yehud as constituting a theocracy. The religious leaders were subject to the imperial representatives, and the imposition of religious practices (such as tithing to the priestly cult) by legal means was idealized by Ezra-Nehemiah and unsuccessful in practice.⁷³

The importance of ethnicity in these *golah* “revival” movements is a matter of considerable debate.⁷⁴ Untangling ethnicity and religion is primarily a modern concept; thus the mass expulsions of non-Judahite wives and their children, and the exclusion of many Judahites from the priesthood because of ambiguous lineage, are unpalatable to the modern reader.

It should be noted, however, that the stated goals of the restoration movements are religious and universal, so that converts are frequently welcomed (Ezra 6:21; 2 Chr 15:9; Isa 42:6, 49:6, 55:5, 56:2-8; Zech 2:11-12, 8:20-23, 14:9, 14:16-21). Nearly all the prophetic visions of restoration include the reintegration of the SK and NK in a renewed state ruled from Jerusalem.

Diaspora

The state of “exile” in Mesopotamia should be more properly considered “Diaspora” after the proclamation of Cyrus freeing the *golah* to return to Yehud. This community retained many of its ethnic and religious distinctives, and kept in contact with the *golah* returnees to Judah (Neh 1:2). These Judahites were able to maintain monotheistic Yahwism apart from a temple cult, an important development in the history of Judaism.

Little is known about the syncretistic Judahites of Egypt, Edom, Ammon and Moab. Hellenistic Jewish life and practice in Alexandria is of little help in this regard, since those Jews were taken captive from Judah in the third century by Ptolemy, or voluntarily migrated to Egypt even later.

⁷³ Jeremiah W. Cataldo, *A Theocratic Yehud? Issues of Government in a Persian Province* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 170-75.

⁷⁴ See Harold C. Washington, “The Strange Woman (אִשָּׁה זָרָה/נְכַרְיָה) of Proverbs 1-9 and Post-Exilic Judean Society,” Daniel Smith-Christopher, “The Mixed Marriage Crisis in Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13: A Study of the Sociology of the Post-Exilic Judaeon Community,” and Tamara C. Eskenazi & Eleanore P. Judd, “Marriage to a Stranger in Ezra 9-10,” all in *Second Temple Studies 2. Temple Community in the Persian Period*, Tamara C. Eskenazi and Kent H. Richards, eds. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994); Schiffman, *From Text to Tradition*, 48; Cohen, “Origins of the Matrilineal Principle.”

IV. SUMMARY

This chapter has examined the fragmentation of Judah and Yahwism, and the attempted reintegration during the Persian period. The following conclusions will be relevant to the establishment of the “unifying” function of Lamentations.

- *Yahwism was pluriform prior to 587 BCE.*

Contrary to the monolatrous biblical ideal, YHWH was worshiped in different sacred locations and with varying degrees of syncretism, as demonstrated both by the biblical portrayals and in the archaeological findings.

- *After 587 BCE, Yahwism became irretrievably fragmented.*

The destruction of the temple and the scattering of Judah eliminated the possibility of complete centralization and uniformity of Yahwistic worship. Strains of Yahwism developed separately in Babylon, Palestine and Egypt.

- *After 587 BCE, most⁷⁵ expressions of Yahwism that made their way into the HB were oriented toward restoration of land, people and temple.*

These hopes were expressed in different ways (inclusion/exclusion of Gentiles, monarchic/hierocratic government). The preservation of the community is *the* driving concern behind the formation of the HB.

⁷⁵ Even Esther, which is not “return”-oriented, is about the preservation of the Jewish people in the Diaspora.

CHAPTER 3

COLLECTIVE LAMENTS IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST AND THE HEBREW BIBLE

I. INTRODUCTION

In the article, “The Costly Loss of Lament,”¹ Brueggemann exposes the deficiencies in (Christian) faith communities caused by the marginalization of canonical laments in liturgy and interpretation. Laments provide a sense of genuine covenantal interaction between the divine and human parties in the covenant: “Where lament is absent, covenant comes into being only as a celebration of joy and well-being....The greater party is surrounded by subjects who are always ‘yes men and women’ from whom ‘never is heard a discouraging word.’”² The lament also keeps the question of theodicy continually prominent.³ A faith that “permits and requires this form of prayer”⁴ is a truly remarkable facet of the emerging Babylonian- and Persian-era Jewish community.

Ritual laments are found among the earliest written materials of the ANE. These traditions, including the laments of the HB—most notably, Lamentations and communal lament psalms—indicate the enduring cultural and religious import of this genre in ancient oral society. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate a particular function of communal laments in ANE communities: that these compositions were intended to enhance community cohesion in times of crisis.

In comparing Lamentations to other ANE laments (particularly the so-called “city-laments”), the purpose is *not* to establish a direct line of literary dependence. Rather, these texts and their liturgical and societal functions serve to calibrate our expectation of the function of Lamentations in the wake of the fall of Jerusalem.

The first premise of this study from chapter one is restated here:

¹ Walter Brueggemann, “The Costly Loss of Lament,” *JSOT* 36 (1986): 57-71.

² *Ibid.*, 60.

³ *Ibid.*, 61-64.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

- ANE laments were not merely personal expressions of emotion. Laments were socially and religiously sanctioned, controlled ways of expressing grief.
- The performance of a lament fulfilled several important functions in a community.
 - First, it contributed to social cohesion in the face of catastrophe.
 - Second, it was a way of elevating the voices of survivors before the world and before heaven.
 - Third, laments provided some sense of completion of the tragic event—a way for individuals and communities to move forward after tragedy.
- Therefore, communal laments (including city laments) function in ancient societies to *maintain social cohesion and unity* in the midst of crisis.

Two kinds of evidence for this thesis are presented in this chapter. Section II draws on modern research regarding the nature and function of ritual laments in oral cultures, ancient and modern. Sections III and IV survey primary sources (Sumerian and Israelite) for evidence of concern with community fragmentation and reconstitution.

II. SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS FUNCTIONS OF RITUAL LAMENTS

Genre

Several authors have given consideration to the notion of genre in ANE laments. Ferris applies the term *genre* to larger categories of literature, and reserves the term *form* for the structure and scheme of individual compositions.⁵

Genre in ANE laments is related to form criticism. Gunkel was interested in the categorization of compositions based on form, origin and apparent sociological setting (*Sitz im Leben*) and function.⁶ Mowinckel applied Gunkel's approach to the reconstruction of the cultic settings and applications of various psalms.⁷ Westermann moves beyond the literary or cultic categories, postulating "two foundational categories: plea and praise." Ferris remarks,

⁵ Paul W. Ferris, Jr., *The Genre of Communal Lament in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

“Westermann presses the form-critic beyond the forms of the surface structures to ask: What happens in a lament and what are the components of what happens?”⁸

Dobbs-Allsopp considers the question of genre at length in *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*.⁹ The goal of his study is to establish the existence of a distinct Hebrew city-lament genre, related to the Mesopotamian city-lament tradition. He considers questions of genre and form to be pragmatic tools of rhetorical criticism; theory is helpful insofar as it illumines the rhetorical intent and rhetorical effect.¹⁰ *Genre* implies a set of shared assumptions between speaker and the audience. But each literary work is a unique appropriation of motifs, language and themes. Literary works in practice cross over genres, do not always include the characteristic elements of a genre, and in general break the “rules” in their own ways.¹¹

Form criticism has distinguished between *dirge* and *lament*. Whereas the lament prayer is “essentially a *plea* addressed to the deity for intervention for help,” the dirge “forewarns against or commemorates the fact of a death and/or destruction.”¹² But though the dirge and the lament differ in certain formal aspects, they perform a similar rhetorical function: to focus the attention of the deity and/or the community upon an injustice or tragedy.¹³

Generic study is a helpful tool in establishing the rhetorical function of ANE communal laments. By considering the common features of laments in general and communal/city laments in particular, we may postulate the rhetorical goals of these compositions, with a particular eye to the issue of community cohesion.

Purpose of Ritual Laments

There are three fundamental motivations behind the performances of ritual laments and dirges, of which any individual composition may have one, two, or all three. These sentiments are the products of irrepressible human emotion, but they are expressed within socially and religiously delineated parameters.

⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁹ F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993), 15-26.

¹⁰ Dobbs-Allsopp, “Darwinism, Genre Theory, and City Laments,” *JAOS* 120 (2000): 625.

¹¹ Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 16-18.

¹² Nancy C. Lee, *Singers of Lamentations: Cities Under Siege, From Ur to Jerusalem to Sarajevo* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 33 (emphasis original). This distinction is fundamental to Lee’s interpretation of the book of Lamentations.

¹³ Brueggemann, “The Costly Loss of Lament,” 63.

At the risk of imposing modern psychological categories on ancient phenomena, one motivation of ritual laments seems to be aiding the grieving and acceptance process of the mourner. This process varies widely. 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 gods' good graces. Through the ritual process, the mourner receives comfort from a community, those who mourn alongside him. After some prescribed period, the mourner must accept the loss and "move on" as tolerably as possible without the deceased, once again meeting the daily difficulties of human existence.

Another fundamental motivation of the ritual lament has been described as *protest*. The mourner makes prominent in the public sphere the injustice of the tragedy and the transgression of the human or divine perpetrator. Linafelt discusses Lamentations as "survivor literature," literature which continually cries out in protest against the perpetrators, and which perpetuates the "existence" of the victim through the survival of literature.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ Protest involves the risk that the survivor may be ignored or suppressed; Linafelt writes, "The very intensity of its rhetoric witnesses to the fact that the literature of survival is all too aware that it might well fail"¹⁶—but nevertheless the protest must be attempted for the sake of justice.

A third fundamental motivation of ritual lament is the preemption of future tragedy. The lament informs the gods and the human community that the tragedy has been accepted as a warning. For example, the recitations of specific laments and *eršemmas* on regular days of the month were designed to prevent the anger of a god over sins of ignorance committed by the king or community.¹⁷ Laments were used at the dedication of a rebuilt temple in order to put the past to rest and ask the gods to bless the future. Laments also reflect upon the transgressions that led to the tragedy, and instruct the audience how to avoid the tragedy that befell the deceased.

¹⁴ Tod Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

¹⁵ Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament," 62.

¹⁶ Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 22.

¹⁷ Mark E. Cohen, *The Canonical Lamentations of Ancient Mesopotamia*, vol. 2 (Potomac, Md.: Capital Decisions Ltd., 1988), 14

Motifs and Practices

Across Cultures

Lee has summarized¹⁸ the seminal research of Hedwig Jahnow¹⁹ on the common motifs shared by dirge songs across cultures. These motifs include:

- Frequently a proclamation of a death, followed by a narration or complaint describing the death/destruction, often accompanied by weeping
- Melancholy over the transitoriness of the deceased/destroyed
- An accusation against the perpetrator, perhaps with a provocative motif, i.e., a call for justice, revenge or a curse
- A call and response performance style that allows for different voices, including perhaps a direct address of the dead or the dead speaking
- Brief questions
- A summons to mourn
- Mourning over the incomprehensibility of the event
- Impact of the death/destruction on the survivors
- Mention of the manner of death, especially if unexpected or due to some violence
- A reconciling motif (a making peace for the survivors with their loss by the fact that the individual's death was brave or noble, the burial honorable, leaving an honorable memory and a good name)
- Praise for the deceased
- A contrast motif (comparing "then and now")
- Occasionally a prayer to God

The performance of the dirge is frequently accompanied by certain customs:

- Shearing of one's head or hair
- Tearing one's clothes
- Wearing sackcloth or other mourning garments

¹⁸ Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 12-19.

¹⁹ *Das hebräische Leichenlied im Rahmen der Völkergedichtung*, BZAW 36 (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1923).

- Mourning with head and/or feet bare
- Throwing dust on the head
- Self-injury
- Rolling or lying on the ground
- Providing comfort for the bereaved through a feast, bread or drink
- Fasting

Jahnow noted that the performance of a dirge is traditionally reserved for women in most cultures.²⁰ In some cultures the dirges are performed by family members of the deceased, whereas other cultures have designated members of the community as singers of laments or dirges.²¹

ANE Practices

Pham has outlined some particulars of ANE mourning rites,²² offering examples of mourning practices from Sumerian, Ugaritic, Egyptian and Babylonian cultures. These practices include supplication, weeping (including “professional wailing women”), tearing of clothes and donning of sackcloth, sitting or lying in the dirt, self-mutilation, throwing dirt on one’s head, fasting, and abstaining from anointing with oil. There are different practices regarding hair: in some instances the mourner lets his/her hair or beard grow to identify with the wild animals and to avoid normal human life; in other instances the shaving of the head or beard symbolizes exposure and shame.²³

Pham also surveys the relevant Hebrew texts, relating them to Job as the most complete example. Israelite practices included the tearing of clothes and the wearing of sackcloth, shaving of the head, prostration and prayer, throwing ashes on the head and sitting on the ash heap, uncovering the body, torso or feet, and fasting. The standard mourning period was seven days (Gen 50:10, 1 Sam 31:13; cf. Jdt 16:24, Sir 22:12). Pham concludes that the mourning rites of biblical Israel are “strikingly parallel” to those of other ANE cultures.²⁴

²⁰ Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 18. See also Adele Berlin, *Lamentations: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 7-10.

²¹ See the discussion of Jeremiah 4-10 below.

²² Xuan Huong Thi Pham, *Mourning in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 16-35.

²³ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 24-27.

Pham considers the term מְנַחֵם (“comforter”) to refer in many instances to a formal participant in the mourning process. The goal of the מְנַחֵם is to assist or conduct the mourner through the time of mourning so as to alleviate grief. The participation of the מְנַחֵם is proof of friendship and covenant loyalty (חסד); enemies do not comfort the mourner. The מְנַחֵם may participate in several ways: performing the same actions as the mourner (weeping, sackcloth, etc.), being silent while the mourner performs these actions, or offering words of advice to the mourner. The מְנַחֵם may be considered to have succeeded or to have failed in comforting the mourner.²⁵

It is important to remember that whereas modern Western culture distinguishes between inward emotion and outward expression, many other cultures make no such distinction. Drawing on the work of Mary Douglas and others, Anderson explains,

Dismissal of the outward form will result in a serious loss to the practitioners of the religion...Once these practices fall into desuetude an essential part of religious life will be lost, for these symbolic actions are not simply reflections of a wider form of human experience, available to all people regardless of circumstance. Rather, particularistic ritual acts of a given religion are ‘the only means of expressing value; [they are] the main instruments of thought, the only regulators of experience.’ Once the behaviors are gone, so is a unique experience of the religious tradition.²⁶

Moreover, the outward performance of a ritual may be a social or religious requirement, carrying with it legal and ethical significance. For example, the requirement to “love” in a covenantal context such as that of Deuteronomy (6:5, etc.) is not fulfilled strictly by inward emotion but outwardly by covenant obedience.²⁷ In a similar fashion, the public ritual performance of a lament or dirge is the obligatory, ethical expression of the emotion already experienced inwardly by the performer. This performance then places upon the audience—society—the obligation to act ethically in ameliorating the situation.

Communal Laments

Cohen describes the communal, collective character of the Mesopotamian laments:

²⁵ Ibid., 27-35.

²⁶ Gary A. Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, a Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion* (The Pennsylvania State University Press: University Park, 1991), 8; citing Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (New York: Pantheon, 1973), 38.

²⁷ Anderson, *A Time to Mourn*, 10-11.

The canonical lamentations of Mesopotamia are... works that lament national humiliation and devastation. These texts describe the destruction of cities, the defiling of temples and the suffering of the population. A common stylistic feature of these compositions is the use of refrains with lengthy, repetitive lists of cities and temples which have been destroyed.²⁸

These laments were integral to the ongoing security and felicity of the society. Cohen explains that certain priests known as *gala*-priests had special ritual responsibilities relating to laments:

- Recitation of laments at funerals
- Recitation of incantation-hymns to keep away evil demons on such occasions as the onset of a journey or the dedication of buildings and objects
- The recitation of lamentations and possibly *eršemmas* during the razing of dilapidated buildings in order to assuage the anger of the gods at seeing their holy shrines being dismantled (perhaps extending to the renovation of sacred objects)²⁹
- The recitation of specific lamentations and *eršemmas* on regular days of the month, to prevent the anger of a god over sins of ignorance committed by the king or community³⁰

These responsibilities were motivated by the fundamental belief that the constitution and functioning of society is dependent upon the continuing presence and favor of the gods. As human beings serve the gods and provide for their “needs” through sacrifices and rituals, the gods reciprocate, each by making its domain (city, agriculture, sun, childbearing, etc.) orderly and productive.³¹

The ritual lament is an acknowledgement on behalf of the community that something about the relationship between the god and the community is not right. Either the community or the deity (or both) must act in order to restore a functioning relationship.

²⁸ Cohen, *CLAM*, II.15.

²⁹ See also W.C. Gwaltney, Jr., “The Biblical Book of Lamentations in the Context of Near Eastern Lament Literature,” in W.W. Hallow, J.C. Moyer, and L.G. Perdue, eds., *Scripture in Context II: More Essays on the Comparative Method* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 191-211.

³⁰ Cohen, *CLAM*, I.14

³¹ John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 23-37.

Since divine and temporal rule were inextricably connected in the ancient world, laments also functioned politically to bolster the legitimacy of particular rulers. Green describes the socio-political function of city laments in Sumer:

The tasks confronting the leaders of Sumer included rebuilding after the damage inflicted on city and countryside alike, and revitalizing the weakened civilization of Sumer, as well as stabilizing the political leadership of the country. In the ensuing contest for power, prospective rulers strove to legitimate their religious and popular authority as well as their military and political might. The city laments which were composed during this era, like many other early Old Babylonian hymns, may be viewed as royal propaganda to curry divine and popular favor.³²

Lee similarly describes a politically unifying function of laments in modern oral cultures. She compares the communal dirge components found in Lamentations to the oral national dirges in South Slavic cultures:

A type of traditional *war* dirge/lament developed, a genre related to heroic oral epic poetry. Such war dirges by soldiers, performed publicly, had an ideological aim: mourning the loss of national glory while constructing a national socio-political ideal.³³

These dirges create cohesion in communities emerging from tragedy by mobilizing the society on behalf of the slain.

Summary

Ritual laments performed several important functions in ancient societies. By bringing a complaint before the deity and the society, the mourner perpetuated the existence of the deceased, contributing to a “just allotment of memory.”³⁴ A lament also obligated the audience to act ethically in response to the tragedy.

Communal laments by their very nature concern the preservation of a group. The performer obligates and mobilizes the deity and the society in the interests of the community as a whole.

³² M.W. Green, “The Uruk Lament,” *JAOS* 104 (1984): 253.

³³ Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 22 (emphasis original).

³⁴ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, K. Blamey and D. Pellauer, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), xv, 86ff.

III. SUMERIAN CITY LAMENTS

Ritual Laments of Ancient Mesopotamia

Three sorts of ritual laments are found in the Sumero-Akkadian literature: city laments, *balags* and *eršemmas*. Ferris notes that there was apparently no technical term for “lament” in Sumerian; these categories come from modern analysis rather than from the source culture itself.³⁵ *Balags* and *eršemmas* are known to have been used as early as the Old Babylonian period, continuously to the Seleucid era.³⁶

Throughout most of the third millennium BCE, four cities dominated the area of southern Mesopotamia known as Sumer. These cities—Ur, Eridu, Nippur and Uruk—were bound together by a common language, Sumerian, and by a common pantheon. The city laments of ancient Mesopotamia are the five compositions relating to the destruction of these cities around 2000 BCE at the hands of the Elamites from the east and the Amorites from the west.³⁷ These laments are entitled: “Lament over the Destruction of Ur” (LU), “Lament over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur” (LSUr), “Nippur Lament” (LN), “Eridu Lament” (LE), and “Uruk Lament” (LW). A composition known as “The Curse of Agade” (CA) is often included in discussions of the city laments because of some similar features, though it is not a city lament *per se*.³⁸

The *balag* expresses lamentation over a public disaster, and was named for the instrument on which it was performed and with which it came to be associated.³⁹ *Balags* are frequently named for a deity (*balag*-GN)⁴⁰ and consist of three main elements: “praise of the deity; narrative describing the destruction of the land, city and population and the reactions of the weeping goddess; and entreaties to halt the destruction and assuage the god’s anger.”⁴¹

The Old Babylonian *eršemma* consists of a single literary unit, whereas the first-millennium *eršemma* may contain up to three literary units. *Eršemmas* were frequently appended to the end of *balags*, forming “a composite lament.”⁴²

³⁵ Ferris, *The Genre of Communal Lament*, 17.

³⁶ Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 13.

³⁷ Daniel Fleming, “Ur: After the Gods Abandoned Us,” *The Classical World* 97 (2003): 5-7.

³⁸ Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 21-22.

³⁹ Ferris, *The Genre of Communal Lament*, 17-18.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴¹ Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 14.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 14.

City Laments

It has been generally acknowledged that the city laments were used as part of the restoration of the specific temples and/or cities.⁴³ Specifically, the lament was performed at the razing of the remains of the old temple in preparation for building a new one. The laments function as pleas for mercy and divine favor, as well as a blessing on the new collective endeavor.

Vanstiphout⁴⁴ identifies five core elements of the city laments:

- Litany
- Description of the tragedy
- Personal lament by god or goddess
- Accusation of god or goddess
- Prayer for a better future, sometimes fulfilled

By considering these elements in each city lament, Vanstiphout theorizes that LSUr reflects a primary phase of the genre, with LU representing the definitive phase. LW, LE and LN represent a secondary or classical phase, and the *balags* and *eršemmas* a tertiary phase appropriating and restructuring elements of the historical city lament.

Dobbs-Allsopp, in a literary analysis of the city laments, identifies nine “major generic features” of these compositions.⁴⁵ Three of these features are of particular interest to this study: the description of the city’s destruction, the personification of the city as a weeping goddess, and the restoration of the city and return of the gods.⁴⁶

The descriptions of the cities found in the city laments are greatly concerned with the completeness of the destruction. The tragedy extends to all the people, the whole society, in all aspects of life. The destruction decreed by the gods and carried out foreign enemies is indiscriminate: everyone—from the priest and king down to the lowest slave, from the city

⁴³ E.g., Cohen, *CLAM*, I.38-39; Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 14-15, 92-94.

⁴⁴ H.L.J. Vanstiphout, “Some Thoughts on Genre in Mesopotamian Literature,” 1-11 in K. Hecker and W. Sommerfeld, eds., *Keilschriftliche Literaturen: ausgewählte Vorträge der XXXII. Rencontre assyriologique internationale* (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1986), 8.

⁴⁵ Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 30.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 66-90.

dwellers to those on the rural outskirts, from those killed or starving in the city to those who are taken captive—suffers a common fate.⁴⁷

The personification of the city as a weeping goddess is found in all the city laments except for LN.⁴⁸ Personification gives voice to the city; the patron goddess grieves over the loss of her temple and treasures, as well as the death, suffering and captivity of her people. As in Lamentations, the goddess's people are sometimes portrayed as her children.

This section will survey these features in the city laments, particularly as they relate to the fragmentation of the cities' populations. Insofar as the city laments call for or celebrate restoration by the gods (Dobbs-Allsopp's ninth generic feature), an important aspect of that restoration is the repatriation of captives and repopulation of the city.

*Lament over Ur (LU)*⁴⁹

LU was the first of the city laments to be known in the modern era, though it is most likely not the oldest of these compositions.⁵⁰ LU is well-preserved on more than twenty tablets, most of which were discovered at Nippur. Fleming remarks, "However the fall of Ur was mourned, the tradition found a home far beyond the community that suffered the immediate loss."⁵¹

LU is comprised of 436 lines divided into eleven *kirugus*. The poem begins with the gods of the various Sumerian cities—including Nanna and Ningal, the patron god and goddess of Ur—abandoning their temples. After laments for the abandoned sanctuaries (*kirugu* 2), the perspective switches to that of Ningal, who weeps over her city (*kirugus* 3-4). *Kirugus* 5-6 describe the destruction wrought by invaders as a storm, a flood which sweeps through the city and the countryside. The seventh *kirugu* returns to Ningal's lamentation for her people. The eighth *kirugu* is a plea to Nanna and Ningal to return, and the final three *kirugus* recount the destruction with a adjuration that such a tragedy never return.

LU has received quite a bit of scholarly attention for several reasons. First, its similarity to the book of Lamentations has long been noted, even prior to the discovery of the

⁴⁷ On descriptions of indiscriminate suffering in Sumerian city laments and Lamentations, see Berlin, *Lamentations*, 13-15.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁴⁹ Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Harps That Once... Sumerian Poetry in Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 447-74.

⁵⁰ Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 19-20.

⁵¹ Fleming, "After the Gods Abandoned Us," 7.

other Sumerian city laments. Second, it is substantial in length and among the most complete of the city laments, making it a useful example of Sumerian literature more generally. Finally, it appears to represent the definitive, “prototypical” form of the city lament genre, succeeding CA and LSUr, and yielding to a “classical phase” in LU, LE and LN.⁵²

LU describes the fall of Sumer as a storm, a great flood that sweeps away everything in its path (110-12, 173-209, 326, 388-414). People of every station and relation (142, 211-16, 219-30, 233-36, 259-64,⁵³ 400-408) suffer death, captivity (79, 250, 271, 283-85, 310) and desolation. Ningal is prominently portrayed as a mother, weeping over her house and her children (103, 237-39, 283-85). The human poet pleads with Ningal to resume her maternal care for her people (369-84). Foreigners violate the formerly inviolable city (240-46, 275-82).

Fleming draws parallels between LU and the great flood legends. The destruction of Ur is described as a storm. In Atrahasis, the nature of the human offense against the gods is similar to that in LU: humans were created to serve the gods, but the high god Enlil becomes offended and decides to wipe them out. Fleming explains:

By casting the destruction of Ur in terms of the worldwide flood, the poet takes advantage of its whole narrative and theological strategy. The comparison itself is not so surprising, when we remark that Sumer was often called “the land,” as if there were no other. If all of Sumer was swept away with Ur, then why not present this as a universal deluge? ...In Atrahasis, the flood is not the end of human life, but provides the basis for establishing a new set of ground rules by which we can live in peace with the gods. The flood has a “never again” aspect, promising that in the future, the gods will act more in their own interest, now that they have had to confront the unlooked-for consequences of total destruction. The lament text can suggest the same, by the very force of the flood analogy.⁵⁴

If Fleming is correct, this connection could support the notion of a “unifying” function of the city lament. The totality and indiscriminacy of the destruction, the postdiluvian fresh start, and the “never again” aspect of the reflection contribute to community cohesion after tragedy.

⁵² Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 20.

⁵³ “On my ones coming from the south he hurled fire;” Jacobsen (*Harps*) notes, “When the attack by Elam and the Sua people threatened, people from the open villages and towns of the city-state had sought refuge in the city behind its walls. They perished with the regular inhabitants.” (463n29)

⁵⁴ Fleming, “After the Gods Abandoned Us,” 15.

*Lament over Sumer and Ur (LSUr)*⁵⁵

LSUr is the longest of the extant city laments, at a length of 519 lines divided into five *kirugus*. Roughly eighty percent of the text is preserved on over thirty tablets.⁵⁶ Michalowski posits that LSur adapted the structure of CA: the curse is directed not at the city but at its enemies.⁵⁷

LSUr begins with the decision of the high divine council to bring calamity upon Sumer and Ur. One of the reasons for this calamity may have been overpopulation; in numerous instances the people are said to be “numerous” (41, 123). The divine decree is “to break up the unity of the people of Nanna, numerous as ewes” (30), and the god Nanna is said to have “traded away his people numerous as ewes” (103). Familial and social relationships are abandoned or broken as part of the destruction wrought by divine decree (12-16, 93-98). In another instance, all Ur suffers the same fate, besieged together by Elam (387-405).

The attack on the city results in the dispersion of the people: “Nintu had scattered the creatures that she had created” (24); “Nintu wept bitter tears over her creatures that she had created” (147). The people are said to have scattered like a school of fish (301,407a). The people are driven out of their homes (32, 186-87). Many are killed; others become fugitives and refugees (186-87, 407, 431). King Ibbi-Sin is taken to exile in Elam (35-37), along with the priests (345) and many of the people (71, 251-53).

The invasion of foreigners is a key part of the calamity, not just because of the attack but also because of the defilement of the city and temple (197). Foreigners, having overtaken the city, “even chase away the dead” (86). The city treasures (169) and the temple personnel and sacred articles (446) are carried off.

As in LU, the destruction of Ur in LSur is consistently described as a great flood/storm (59, 76, 81, 94, 107-08, 113, 163, 175-77, 207, 214, 405, 427, 456), including an adjuration to the storm itself at the beginning of the fifth *kirugu* (483-91). The invaders wreak indiscriminate havoc just as a flood—no one is spared.

The deities depart the cities of Sumer as the temples are destroyed one by one. Some of the deities become refugees (207-09), whereas others are said to have gone into exile with

⁵⁵ Piotr Michalowski, *The Lamentation Over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1989).

⁵⁶ Ferris, “Lamentations: 2. Ancient Near Eastern Background,” 410-13 in T. Longman and P. Enns, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 411.

⁵⁷ Michalowski, *The Lamentation Over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur*, 9.

their people to Elam (271-78). The deities lament the loss of their people (147-48, 178-79, 225-42, 273-78). The restoration of the life and prosperity of the people is the decree of Enlil that triggers the restoration in the fourth and fifth *kirugus* (461-74; 509-13).

*Lament over Eridu (LE)*⁵⁸

LE exists in fragments of eight *kirugus* and approximately 160 lines. The focus of the composition is the destruction of Eridu as it pertains to the cult of Enki and Damgalnunna.

LE is not particularly concerned with the collective fate of the people of the city, but rather emphasizes the divine aspect of the invasion. In the first *kirugu* the god and goddess abandon the city and temples in tears (1:12-14). *Kirugus* 5-7 also describe the distress of the gods, including the gods of other Sumerian cities as they abandon their homes. Only three fragmentary lines of the eighth *kirugu* are extant; based on a single complete line (“...May he restore it for you”), Green suggests that this stanza “celebrates Enki’s return and Eridu’s restoration.”⁵⁹

The second through fourth *kirugus* describe the destruction as a storm that moves through the city, penetrating the city gate (2:4) and foundations (2:12-13), attacking the ziggurat (2:14-16) and its entrance (2:17-18). The temple cult ceases; musicians, priests/priestesses, keepers of animals, governors and hired men—all are destroyed (3:5-16). Foreigners (Elamites and Subarians) defile the temple (3:17; 4:10).

Other than these brief mentions, LE pays little attention to the destruction of the people. When Damgalnunna weeps she is concerned with her temple home, not with the fate of the population as her children (3:14-15; 5:3-11).⁶⁰

*Lament over Uruk (LW)*⁶¹

LW consisted of twelve *kirugus*, of which only the first five and the last have been substantially preserved in 231 lines. In the first *kirugu*, the divine council purposes to attack Sumer for the “sin” of overpopulation. *Kirugus* 2-5 describe the destruction of Uruk and Sumer. The twelfth *kirugu* is a prayer of King Išme-Dagan to the city’s patron goddess, Inanna.

⁵⁸ M.W. Green, “The Eridu Lament,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 30 (1978): 127-67.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁶⁰ It could be speculated that her departure “as a flying bird” might be construed as a mother bird leaving her eggs or young.

⁶¹ Green, “The Uruk Lament,” 253-79.

Like LSUr, LW offers overpopulation as the divine rationale for the destruction of Sumer (1.4, 1a.3). The destruction is described variously as a horrible monster (1.13-27, 3.3-18), an evil spirit (2.7), and a devastating flood (3.3-6, 4.22, 5.20). These sets of imagery cast the attack as complete, indiscriminate destruction, on people of all ages, classes and professions (2.13-20, 2.28-31). After a panic (1.25, 2.13, 4.13), corpses begin to pile up like hay tossed on a pitchfork (3.16). The nation is “sundered” (3.9): many are killed, some betray their homeland (3.21), some are exiles (5.2; perhaps B.1-5⁶²), and some are refugees (5.9).

Green speculates that somewhere in the broken *kirugus* 7-11 would be “the private laments of Inanna and the Anunna-gods; probably also a description of royal reconstruction at Uruk.”⁶³ These are reasonable guesses based on comparison with the other city laments, but the fact remains that the figure of the personified goddess weeping for her children is not present in the preserved half of the text.

*Lament over Nippur (LN)*⁶⁴

Like LW, LN consists of twelve *kirugus*, containing a total of 323 lines. Ferris observes that LN is different from the other city laments in that its theme and tone shift significantly halfway through. The first five *kirugus* describe the destruction and suffering of the city, but the last seven praise the king and Enlil for restoration.⁶⁵ This aspect of LN makes it of particular value to this study: a lamentation is coupled with a restoration plan, and both are concerned with the fragmentation and reconstitution of the people.

As in LU, LSUr and LW, the sin of the people of Nippur appears to be overpopulation (LN 16-17, 32). Enlil—the highest god save for An—and his consort, Ninlil, are the patron deities of Nippur. Enlil decrees that the city, the temples and the people must fall to foreign invaders. Unlike the helpless patron deities of Ur and Uruk, Enlil decides to punish his city himself. Whereas the patron goddesses of the other cities weep for their people, in LN the city is personified (not as a goddess per se) and weeps for itself (117-38).

The destruction of Nippur’s people is complete (12, 65) and indiscriminate (42-49, 66, 98). The temples are defiled by foreigners (12, 60, 64, 263). Victims are carried off into

⁶² Section B consists of five broken lines, which Green suggests form the beginning of the seventh, eighth or ninth *kirugu* (“The Uruk Lament,” 275).

⁶³ Green, “The Uruk Lament,” 254.

⁶⁴ J.A. Black, G. Cunningham, J. Ebeling, E. Flückiger-Hawker, E. Robson, J. Taylor and G. Zólyomi, *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>), Oxford, 1998-2006.

⁶⁵ Ferris, “Lamentations,” 411.

captivity (101). Interestingly, LN does not use the storm/flood metaphor to describe the destruction. The personified city weeps over the people as her children (117-26).

The rebuilding of Nippur under King Išme-Dagan is complete (163) and restores the people to their previous abundance, prosperity and security (206-10, 219, 255-61, 268). Those who were scattered as refugees or captives are regathered to the city (214-15, 274). The foreigners who formerly oppressed Nippur now bow to the Sumerian gods (243). Whereas family relationships had been destroyed by death or betrayal, now families are harmonious once again (284-95).

*Curse of Agade (CA)*⁶⁶

CA is frequently discussed alongside the five city laments.⁶⁷ Though its purpose and structure appear to be different from those of these other compositions, many of the themes and motifs are similar. CA fundamentally reverses⁶⁸ the logic and purpose of the city laments; after initially describing the happy and prosperous state of Agade, CA recounts the alienation and departure of Inanna, after which the city is destroyed and cursed by the gods of Babylonia.

Though the overall purpose and order of events in CA are the inverse of the city laments, the theme of fragmentation is still present. The weeping goddess is exchanged for an angry goddess who leaves Agade and curses her people.

The first portion of CA expounds the blessing and prosperity formerly enjoyed by the people of Agade from Inanna. All the people ate, drank and celebrated festivals together (14-19). The elderly received wisdom and the young enjoyed physical strength (29-39). Inanna is then displeased and withdraws her protection, exposing the city. The attack is swift, and the rich and poor, the powerful and the weak, the honest and the liar—all perish together (181-95). The few who survive perform ritual laments together—young and old, male and female (195-209).

Three key portions of the divine curse on Agade involve the sundering of the people. First, survivors will mourn their relatives: brothers, sisters and spouses (215-218). Next, the

⁶⁶ Jerrold S. Cooper, *The Curse of Agade* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

⁶⁷ Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 21-22; Cooper, *The Curse of Agade*, 20-28; Michalowski, *The Lamentation Over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur*, 8-9.

⁶⁸ I speak of the “reversal” or the “exchange” in CA of certain aspects of the city laments only to facilitate comparison, not to imply that CA represents a later tradition dependent on the city laments, since CA likely predates all the Sumerian city laments (Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 20).

survivors cannibalize their own children (237-41). Finally, the powerful protectors of society are reduced to starvation (245-256).

Summary

Of the six compositions considered in this section, five exhibit consistent concern for the destruction and fragmentation of the city's population. Fragmentation involves the breakup of social, religious and family structures, indiscriminate destruction of all classes and groups of people, and the death, destitution, flight or captivity of the whole populace.

Furthermore, wherever these poems describe divine or royal restoration—whether anticipated or realized—the regathering of the people and the reconstitution of those social and familial structures are important components of that restoration. CA reverses the motif: the society descends from prosperity and cohesion into betrayal, fragmentation and loss.

In four of these compositions the people are considered to be the children of the goddess/personified city. In LU and LSUr, the city's goddess weeps for her children; in LN the personified city weeps for her children; and in CA the goddess abandons and curses the people as her children.

IV. COMMUNAL AND CITY LAMENTS IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

Psalms of Communal Lament

A communal lament, by definition, is a dirge/plea on behalf of a community. The communal laments of the Hebrew Psalter reflect upon the troubles that have come upon Israel as a people, and ask YHWH to restore the community once again.

Ferris has compiled a chart comparing nine scholars' classifications of communal laments in the Hebrew Psalter.⁶⁹ These definitions of the genre may be as broad as to include up to twenty-six psalms, or as narrow as to include only six or seven. The psalms studied in this section (Pss 44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83) were chosen as examples of the genre because of their near-universal acknowledgement among Ferris' scholars as communal laments.

Dobbs-Allsopp observes that these communal laments bear some form-critical resemblance to the *balags* in five key aspects: address to the deity (YHWH); praise of the

⁶⁹ Ferris, *The Genre of Communal Lament*, 16. The chart is compiled from selected works of the following scholars between 1891 and 1974: S.R. Driver, H. Gunkel, S. Mowinckel, O. Essfeldt, C. Westermann, A. Weiser, O. Kaiser, A. Anderson, L. Sabourin.

deity; description of devastation; lament; and plea to the deity.⁷⁰ Yet these laments differ from city laments, “lack[ing] some of the genre’s diagnostic features, especially the motif of the personified city.”⁷¹

Nevertheless, the communal laments have in common with the city laments the theme of complete, indiscriminate destruction, expressed using similar imagery. Additionally, though the communal laments lack a goddess or personified city weeping over her children, their pleas to YHWH may appeal to Israel’s status as YHWH’s children.

In the communal laments the main concern is the destruction or oppression of Israel as a people. The shattering of the nation has occurred or is imminent (60:1-3; 79:2-3; 80:12-13; 83:3-4). Foreigners have invaded (44:13; 74:3-8; 79:1-4; 80:13; 83:4-8). Israel is threatened with captivity (44:11-12; 74:20-21; 79:11), and the next generation is in jeopardy (79:13). The laments appeal to YHWH for salvation by linking his reputation to the fate of his people collectively (44:8, 26; 60:4-5, 10; 74:10, 18, 22-23; 79:9-10; 80:16; 83:18). These appeals may be based in the founding myth of Israel, the exodus/conquest (44:2-3; 74:2; 80:8-11).

The communal laments use several literary techniques found in the city laments. The laments are characterized by repeated interrogatory demands such as “How long?” (44:23-24; 60:9-10; 74:1, 10-11; 79:5; 80:4) In five of the six psalms examined, the people of Israel are portrayed as sheep under the pastoral care of the deity (44:11, 22; 74:1; 79:13; 80:1; 83:12). Those who live in the desolate remains after the crisis will be molested by wild animals (44:19; 74:19; 79:2; 80:13). Destruction may be portrayed as a storm (83:13-15).

Like the city laments, some of these communal laments also make use of the geographical sweep, but with a twist. In the city laments, the destruction progresses from city to city, and then from the outer environs of the city into the heart: the sanctuary of the patron deities. In the six communal laments, the geographical sweep more frequently describes the salvation of YHWH moving through the land (60:6-8; 74:12-17; 80:2; 83:9-12), though it may describe the sweep of destruction (74:3-8) or the nations amassing against Israel (83:5-8).

City Lament Genre

Dobbs-Allsopp identifies eight passages in the HB outside Lamentations that represent in his assessment a “comprehensive modulation” of an Israelite city lament genre. Of these

⁷⁰ Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 155.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*,.

passages, six are oracles against the nations (Isa 15-16; 23; 47; Jer 48; 50-51; Zeph 2:13-15) and two are oracles against Israel and/or Judah (Mic 1; Jer 4-6, 8-10).

It is important to note that some of these passages are not *laments* per se, in that their purpose is not necessarily to express grief over loss, to bring comfort to the afflicted, or to register a complaint before the deity or society. Rather, some oracles function more like CA: describing the formerly blessed state of the city and the subsequent (current or future) divinely ordained destruction. As such, they serve as a warning against the fragmentation of the people in view. The composition is performed on the deity's behalf in order to mobilize the society against the possibility of its own disintegration.

Two representative passages discussed here contain good examples of two of the city-lament features considered earlier: the complete-destruction motif and the weeping-goddess image. In the monotheistic HB, the weeping-goddess is replaced by the city's personification as a woman (e.g., *bat-X*).⁷²

Isaiah 15-16

This *maśša'* ("burden" or "oracle") against Moab contains several features of the city lament genre. Like the storm that moves methodically from city to city through Sumer, the cities and temples of Moab are stricken one by one (15:1-9). Like the weeping goddesses of Sumer who cry out as the enemy approaches their cities, the personified cities and country cry out and mourn (15:2, 4; 16:7).⁷³ The poet himself mourns and urges mourning for Moab (15:5; 16:7, 9, 11).

All the people of Moab suffer, including urban and rural dwellers (15:3, 6-7; 16:8-10). Many are killed (15:9), others live as desolate *she'erit* in the land (15:3, 9; 16:14), and some flee as refugees to the surrounding peoples (16:2-4). The people are like birds driven from nests (16:2).

The *maśša'* against Moab contains a hopeful interlude (16:1-5). In a twist on the royal/divine restoration motif found in the city laments, Moab's only hope is to take shelter in Judah (16:1-4) under the protection of its most prominent (from an Israelite perspective) son:

⁷² See Dobbs-Allsopp's discussion of the similarities between the weeping goddess and the personified city: *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 77-90; Mark Biddle, "The Figure of Lady Jerusalem: Identification, Deification and Personification of Cities in the Ancient Near East," in K.L. Younger et al., eds., *The Biblical Canon in Comparative Perspective* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1991), 173-94.

⁷³ Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 101-02. Dobbs-Allsopp prefers the emendation of בית to חב in 15:2a ("Daughter of Dibon/Dimon").

David (16:5). The Davidic king will restore justice by integrating the oppressed and the refugees into the protection of society (16:3-4).

Jeremiah 4-6, 8-10

These passages in Jeremiah contain some of the most striking parallels to the Sumerian city laments. The oracles describe the (real and/or envisioned) destruction of Judah and Israel.

As in the city laments, the destruction is compared to a storm (4:13) and sweeps methodically through named regions (4:15-16). The destruction is complete, with many dead (4:7, 29; 6:1, 6-8; 9:11). Others are refugees (4:6, 29; 6:1), exiles (10:18), or desolate *she'erit* who wish they had perished (6:9-12; 8:3). The destruction extends to all classes of society (4:9-10; 5:4-5; 6:11-15); the rural refugees flee to the city and perish in the siege alongside the urban dwellers (8:14). Families are broken by death (5:17) and betrayal (5:1; 6:13-14; 8:10; 9:4-9). The bones of rich and poor alike will be unearthed and desecrated (8:1-3).

Eleven times the personified city is referred to as “daughter of Zion” or “daughter of my people.” Daughter Zion is told to weep for her children (4:30-31; 5:7-9; 6:26); she weeps over her children’s plight (4:19-22; 10:19-21), as does the poet (8:18-9:3). Her children are pictured as scattered birds or lambs (4:25; 10:21)

Like the city laments, these oracles describe ritual acts of lamentation designed to assuage the anger of the deity. These acts include sounding of warning by trumpet (4:5, 21; 6:1), the wearing of sackcloth (4:8; 6:26), loud wailing (4:8, 19; 6:26; 9:10), raising of hands in protest or anguish (4:31), weeping day and night (9:1), and the use of professional mourners⁷⁴ (9:17-22). In each instance, those mourned are the children of the “goddess,” the people of the country. If the whole passage is viewed as a lament, the ritual includes praise of the deity’s power and justice, in the hope of restoration and retribution for the human perpetrators (10:1-16, 23-25).

Summary

The communal laments appeal to the deity on behalf of the society, whereas the city-lament modulation passages appeal to the society on behalf of the deity. The threat to the

⁷⁴ 9:17bc reads: :ולחן ותבואנה ואלהחכמות שלחו ותבואנה (“Consider, call the **female dirge-singers**, and let them come; send to those who are **skillful**, and let them come”).

society in both instances is the same: destruction and fragmentation, described explicitly and implicitly through literary features.

Though the monotheism of the HB did not permit portrayal of goddesses, in at least one of the passages considered (Jer 4-10) the nation is personified as a woman weeping for her children. Elsewhere, the people are portrayed as the children of YHWH himself (Ps 80:15-17).

V. CONCLUSION

In preparation for an in-depth study of the rhetorical function of Lamentations in second temple contexts, this chapter examines the functions of compositions that share some generic features with Lamentations, including Sumerian city laments, Hebrew psalms of communal lament, and Hebrew compositions with significant affinity to the Sumerian city laments.

Section II discussed the religious and social functions of ritual laments, including emotive expression, protest, ethical demand, and mobilization of the society or deity on the mourner's behalf. Communal laments similarly mobilize the deity on behalf on an entire group whose survival and/or cohesion is threatened.

Sections III and IV demonstrated from primary texts that the survival of the group is a consistent concern for the communities in which these texts were composed, performed and preserved. All but one of the fourteen texts studied describe—either in protest or in warning—the totality and indiscriminacy of destruction and the dispersion of the people. The tragedy tears apart familial and social bonds; the plea of the communal lament is that those bonds be restored.

The next chapter of this study will examine Lamentations for the ritual lament features discussed in this chapter. Furthermore, we will discuss certain other rhetorical features of Lamentations that make the book so rhetorically powerful as a communal lament.

CHAPTER 4

DIVIDED COMMUNITIES IN LAMENTATIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

Chapter two of this study summarized what is known about fragmentation of Judah after the Babylonian invasion and the attempts at restoration during the period of Persian rule. Different forms of Yahwistic worship developed in the *golah*, *she'erit* and Diaspora communities, and virtually all of the Hebrew canonical literature of this period is concerned with the restoration of the people to the land of Palestine and the reintegration of the communities in various ways.

Chapter three sought to establish community preservation as a primary purpose of the Sumerian city laments, as well as the communal laments of the HB. In these texts the (potential or realized) catastrophe affects all members of the society equally and indiscriminately. The lament consists of an appeal to the deity that s/he might regather and restore the members of the group who remain.

The first goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that the book of Lamentations, like the Hebrew communal laments and the Sumerian city laments, is chiefly concerned with the preservation and restoration of the scattered Judahite people. The second goal of this chapter is to describe certain poetic features of the book of Lamentations that contribute to this ongoing preservative/cohesive function in Jewish communities, even beyond the immediate aftermath of the Babylonian destruction and the early Persian restoration attempts.

Lamentations displays tension between *completeness* and *incompleteness* in both its *form* and its *content*. The utter decimation of the society is reflected in the *complete* and indiscriminate destruction of Judah's people and institutions, and in the *incomplete* and fragmented state of Judah's population. Throughout the book, this tension plays itself out in various ways, adopting the acrostic form to accentuate the complete/incomplete motif.

II. THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

Date

The dating of Lamentations is not nearly as contentious a point as the dating of many other books of the HB. It is generally acknowledged that the book refers to the events of 587 BCE. Most interpreters hold that its poems were composed before 538 BCE, since the text does not reflect the turn of Judah's fortunes in Cyrus' edict. Moreover, the "direct impact of the calamity" is still felt, indicating composition relatively soon after the events described. Still, there have been attempts to situate the book in later periods, even as late as the Maccabean period.¹

The present study favors the traditional dating of the book between the fall of Jerusalem and the Cyrus edict. However, three caveats must be given. First, it is not at all certain that the poems were composed by a single author during one period; some or all may have been composed early and only later collected into a single book.

Second, given the continuing liturgical significance of the book even after the temple was rebuilt, it is not impossible to imagine that part or all of Lamentations could have been composed as the temple was being rebuilt or even afterward. To think about this another way: the second temple community did not discard this text even after the tragedy it describes was in some measure reversed; therefore, we cannot be certain that such a text—if it were composed during or after the rebuilding—would necessarily mention the reversal of the events of 587 BCE.

Third, the lack of historical references in Lamentations has the effect of dislodging the book from its historical context. This will be explored in greater detail in Section V. None of the literary observations made in this chapter is dependent upon a specific dating of Lamentations.

¹ Claus Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*, Charles Muenchow, trans. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 54-55.

Composition and Authorship

The traditional view of Jeremian authorship, indicated by the LXX version of 1:1, has long been questioned.² The received Hebrew text of Lamentations makes no claim of authorship.

Westermann summarizes the arguments of those who take positions for and against unified authorship.³ Some have argued based on form-critical criteria that Lamentations 3 represents a later form than the other chapters, closer to the penitential prayers.⁴ Others argue that the individual chapters are the product of multiple sources.⁵ The reversal of the traditional alphabetical order of ו and ה in the acrostics of Lamentations 2-4 is sometimes cited as an indication of multiple authors, but this will be questioned in Section III below.

This chapter focuses on the canonical form of Lamentations and its constituent poems as individual compositions. The use of the acrostic form indicates that the individual poems were intended as discrete units,⁶ meaning either that they were single compositions, or that their (possible) sources underwent significant revision in order to be adapted into acrostics.⁷ In either case, each poem will be treated as a whole. Furthermore, the five poems will be treated together as an intentionally edited collection, irrespective of authorship.

Genre and Form

Most interpreters acknowledge some generic affinity between Lamentations 1, 2 and 4, and that Lamentations 3 and 5 differ from these other three in significant ways.

² However, Nancy C. Lee has recently argued for an affinity between portions of Jeremiah and the “prophetic voice” in Lamentations; see Lee, *Singers of Lamentations: Cities Under Siege, From Ur to Jerusalem to Sarajevo* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

³ Westermann, *Lamentations*, 56-58.

⁴ Mark J. Boda, “The Priceless Gain of Penitence: From Communal Lament to Penitential Prayer in the ‘Exilic’ Liturgy of Israel,” 81-101 in N. C. Lee and C. Mandolfo, eds., *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts* (Atlanta: SBL, 2008).

⁵ Robert B. Salters, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Lamentations* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 4-7. See also Cornelius Houk, “Multiple Poets in Lamentations,” *JSOT* 30(2005): 111-125; Houk’s speculative approach (based on counts of words of different lengths) is not quite convincing, but he summarizes several source-critical approaches to the book.

⁶ Boda, “The Priceless Gain of Penitence,” 90.

⁷ The presence of diverse non-acrostic sources within the individual acrostic poems seems less likely, given that most scholars regard the unified form of Lamentations as “a work of high literary or poetic merit” (Westermann, *Lamentations*, 58). Nevertheless, perhaps the poets receive too little credit in this regard.

There is near unanimity that Lamentations 5 is a communal lament.⁸ There is less agreement concerning the forms of the other poems. Gunkel designates Lamentations 1, 2 and 4 as “communalized dirges.”⁹ Others have described these chapters as communal laments or “mixed forms.”¹⁰

Boda considers Lamentations 3 to be a sort of mediating form between the laments and the later penitential prayers (e.g., Isa 63:7-64:12; Neh 1, 9; Dan 9). Lamentations 3 appears to contain features in common both with the other chapters of Lamentations and with the penitential prayers. This will be discussed further in Section V below.

Sitz im Leben

Any proposed *Sitz im Leben* for Lamentations will be somewhat dependent upon the date of the book’s composition. However, Westermann observes that the poems need not have been written down or collected in order to have been involved in cultic ceremonies.¹¹

Lamentations has a significant role in later Jewish and Christian tradition. The book is read in the synagogue to commemorate the destruction of the temple on the Ninth of Av.¹² Roman Catholic liturgy follows this practice during Holy Week.¹³ These later liturgical uses of Lamentations will be discussed further below. For now, it is important to note the similarities between these later liturgical uses and the apparent settings of the Sumerian city laments. The city laments were performed as the first step toward restoration as destroyed cities and temples were razed in preparation for rebuilding.¹⁴ After the construction of the new temples, the city laments continued to be used to commemorate tragedy, to appease the gods, and to celebrate the new temples. Like later Jewish and Christian uses of Lamentations, the

⁸ Westermann, *Lamentations*, 59.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹² Kathleen O’Connor, “The Book of Lamentations,” 1011-1072 in *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary: Vol. 6* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

¹³ Westermann, *Lamentations*, 62.

¹⁴ Mark E. Cohen, *The Canonical Lamentations of Ancient Mesopotamia*, vol. 1 (Potomac, Md.: Capital Decisions Ltd., 1988), 38-39; F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993), 14-15, 92-94.

city laments had enduring ritual and cultural significance long after the commemorated catastrophic events had been reversed.¹⁵

With these similarities in view, some have suggested that Lamentations (or its chapters in some form) may have been used as part of a razing or rededication ceremony at the site of the Jerusalem temple.¹⁶ Hillers observes that loud weeping and mourning was associated with the consecration of the foundations of the second temple (Ezra 3:3, 12-13).¹⁷ Gwaltney notes Zechariah's mention of ritual fasts commemorating the onset of Nebuchadnezzar's final siege, the breaching of the walls, the burning of the temple and the slaying of Gedaliah (Zech 7:3-5; 8:19).¹⁸ Jeremiah 41:5 describes eighty Israelite men who were slain in Mizpah on their way to "the house of YHWH," where they intended to make sacrifices with "beards shaved and clothes torn"—perhaps as part of some ritual lament at the site of the temple.

While there is no definitive proof, it seems likely that Hebrew laments such as those found in Lamentations would have been part of commemoration, razing or restoration rituals such as these. The importance of Lamentations in tradition, as evidenced by later liturgical use as well as allusions in other literature such as Deutero-Isaiah, may point to early exilic and postexilic prominence.

III. FORM AND MEANING: ACROSTIC ARTIFICE

It is well known that four of the five poems of Lamentations are alphabetic acrostics. The purpose of the acrostic form and its relevance to interpretation has been a subject of some debate, particularly in light of recent attention to the literary aspects of the book of Lamentations.

The purpose of the acrostic form is the subject of recent research by the author of the present study. This section will summarize some relevant contributions of this work to the study of Lamentations generally and to the particular thesis of this study.

¹⁵ For Jews this would be the rebuilding of the temple, while for Christians it is the resurrection of Jesus.

¹⁶ W.C. Gwaltney, Jr., "The Biblical Book of Lamentations in the Context of Near Eastern Lament Literature," in W.W. Hallow, J.C. Moyer, and L.G. Perdue, eds., *Scripture in Context II: More Essays on the Comparative Method* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 191-211.

¹⁷ Delbert R. Hillers, *Lamentations* (Anchor Bible Commentary; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 35.

¹⁸ Gwaltney, "Lamentations in Context," 210.

Alphabetical Acrostics: Previous Study

In a recent article, this author offered a summary and critique of some recent work on the acrostic form in the HB, and posited a theory regarding the use of certain verbal forms in acrostic poetry.¹⁹ This article proposed that “alphabetical thinking” manifests itself differently in each of the Hebrew acrostics.²⁰ The acrostics do not display a preference for any single subject, theme or generic form. The acrostic form is most likely intended to evoke the idea or sense of *completeness* through the use of the entire alphabet from א to ת. Additionally, the acrostics appear to exhibit a preference for the use of the *qatal* (“perfect”) verbal form over the *yiqtol* (“imperfect”) form; this is partly due to the limits of the acrostic artifice,²¹ and partly due to the perfective, completed connotation of the alphabetic acrostic form.²²

The acrostic form, utilized so neatly and intentionally in Lamentations 1-4, provides a tool for interpreting the often-vague paratactic relationship²³ between poetic lines:

The acrostic poems have at least one discourse feature, however artificial, that connects each line to the next. Like the wayyiqtol in narrative, the alphabet is the macrosyntactic framework of the acrostic poem. Unlike a narrative, however, a poem does not need to progress temporally, though it may do so.²⁴

The acrostic form, therefore, has two significant implications for the study of Lamentations. First, the use of the entire alphabet in order connotes completeness—the complete devastation of Judah and the fullness of anguish. Second, the use of the rigid form accentuates the points at which the poetry resists or breaks the requirements of the form.

¹⁹ Benjamin D. Giffone, “A ‘Perfect’ Poem: The Use of the QATAL Verbal Form in the Biblical Acrostics,” *Hebrew Studies* 51 (2010): 49-72.

²⁰ Pss 9-10 is considered by many to be a single acrostic, though quite “messy.” Nah 1:2-10 may be a half-acrostic. The other acrostics include: Pss 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119 and 145; Prv 31:10-31; Lam 1-4.

²¹ Since Hebrew is primarily a verb-subject-object (VSO) language, the acrostic’s predetermination of the initial letter of poetic line relegates a verse-initial *yiqtol* form to the א, ו, י and ת lines, whereas the *qatal* may occur at the beginning of any line in the acrostic.

²² Giffone, “A ‘Perfect’ Poem,” 61.

²³ Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 6.

²⁴ Giffone, “A ‘Perfect’ Poem,” 61.

This idea is developed in a more recent presentation.²⁵ In “How Lonely Sits the Text,” this author contributes to the view of Lamentations (especially Lam 1-2) as Zion’s protest against abuse at the hands of YHWH her husband. This presentation is in line with the work of Linafelt,²⁶ Dobbs-Allsopp,²⁷ Mandolfo²⁸ and others—but utilizes a discourse-analytical approach²⁹ based on the acrostic as a macrosyntactic structure. This argument is given here as an example of the value of this approach:

Zion’s eagerness to appeal her abused status breaks across the macrosyntactic constraints of Lamentations 1. The rigid acrostic form—22 verses of three lines each (excepting the addition in 1:7b)—points to a natural division in the poem: between verses 11 and 12.

²⁵ Giffone, “How Lonely Sits the Text: Lamentations 1-2 and Evangelical Appropriation of Postmodern Biblical Studies” (Eastern regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, March 4, 2011).

²⁶ Tod Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

²⁷ F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, “R(az/ais)ing Zion in Lamentations 2,” in B.F. Batto and K.L. Roberts, eds., *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J.J.M. Roberts* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 21-68; “Tragedy, Tradition and Theology in the Book of Lamentations,” *JSOT* 74 (1997): 29-60.

²⁸ Carleen Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

²⁹ Following generally the approach of Tania Notarius, “Poetic Discourse and the Problem of Verbal Tenses in the Oracles of Balaam,” *Hebrew Studies* 49 (2008): 55-86.

Lam 1		Speaker	Addressee
1-8	...		
9	Her uncleanness is in her skirts; she did not remember her end. And so she goes down wonderfully! She has no comforter.	Observer	General
	“ Look , YHWH, at my affliction, for the enemy has become great!”	Daughter Zion!	YHWH
10	...		
11	All her people groan, searching for bread; They give their treasures for food to bring back the soul.	Observer	General
	“ Look , YHWH, and see that I am despised!”	Daughter Zion!	YHWH
12-16	12 “Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by on the road? Look and see whether there is any sorrow like my sorrow...”	Daughter Zion!	Passersby
17	...	Observer	General
18-22	...		Peoples
	20 “ Look , YHWH, for I am in distress...”	Daughter Zion!	YHWH
	...		

Verses 1-11 are spoken by a third-person omniscient voice concerning Zion, and verses 12-22 are mostly spoken by Zion to YHWH and others. But Zion twice “bursts out” against YHWH with the accusatory **רָאָה** (1:9c) and **רָאָה וְהִבִּיטָהּ** (1:11c). If we could imagine the acrostic as creating a poetic space for a courtroom-style testimony, Zion’s turn to accuse as the pathetic victim is *supposed* to come at verse 20—the **ו** line is the proper place for **רָאָה וְהִבִּיטָהּ**—but she cannot restrain herself and speaks out of turn.³⁰

Here we see how the acrostic form accentuates the dialogue between the two voices in Lamentations 1. The voices imbalance the two halves of the poem created by the neat acrostic artifice.

The idea of the **ו** line as the “proper” moment for the accusation is supported by the repetition of **רָאָה וְהִבִּיטָהּ** in 2:20. Of course, it could be argued that these repetitions are simply the result of the fact that **ראה** is by far the most frequently-used word beginning with **ו** in the HB; indeed, various conjugations of **ראה** occur as thirteen out of twenty-two “key words”³¹ in

³⁰ Giffone, “How Lonely Sits the Text,” 12.

³¹ The term *key word* refers to “the word in a poetic line that links the line to the acrostic. Most often the key word will be the first word, but this is not always the case” (Giffone, “A ‘Perfect’ Poem,” 50n2).

ר lines of the biblical acrostics. But the use of (וְהִבִּיטָה) רָאָה in the twentieth line does not appear to violate the logical progression of either Lamentations 1 and 2; it does not seem that the poet(s) forced the poetry into the artifice in this regard. Rather, the “deviant” repetition of רָאָה in 1:9 and 1:11 (not to mention הִבִּיטוּ וְרָאוּ in 1:12) accentuates the “proper” artificial usage in 1:20 and 2:20.

Lee proposes a similar way of thinking about the usage of the עִפְצֵי lines in Lamentations. She remarks, “This acrostic pattern is being used in a rhetorical battle, at some stage along the way, between two groups of singers with very different theological outlooks.”³² She observes that most of the acrostic psalms are “heavily invested in the idea of ‘retributive justice,’” making significant use of the צדק root.³³ By contrast, Lamentations offers a critique of YHWH’s retributive justice, replacing צדיק in 1:18 with צעק (“cry out”) in 2:18, צוד (“hunt”) in 3:52 and 4:18, צמת (“annihilate”) in 3:53, and צוף (“flow/engulf”) in 3:54. This apparent perversion of justice is signaled prior to the צ line by the reversal of the ע and פ lines in Lamentations 2-4:

Lamentations...presents dissident singers (and perhaps a dissident scribe/redactor) who in their rebelling against a simplistic retributive understanding of events, I propose employ the acrostic structure to *invert* that order of justice, with strategic inverting of the letters ע and פ. It is probably no accident that these letters suggest in their root meaning what someone (or YHWH) “sees” and “speaks,”³⁴ and they precede the צ letter. (Indeed, the female singer in Lam 2:18 [sic]³⁵ admits to “rebelling against YHWH’s word” or, literally, mouth, פה). The צ word to follow that is most often used or emphasized in the psalmic acrostics, and used for YHWH and his *righteous* followers is צדיק. Yet the acrostic with the first inversion of letters in Lam 2 leads not to the expected צדיק but to Jeremiah’s appeal to the female singer to “cry out” (צעק) in lament, a virtual wordplay with צדיק!³⁶ ...The *only other instance of an acrostic in the Hebrew Bible with these inverted letters* is in the *lament* of Pss 9-10, and there the צ line is completely missing (!), replaced with descriptions of the wicked persecuting the poor.³⁷

³² Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 165.

³³ *Ibid.*, 164 (emphasis original). Cognates of צדק occur thirty-seven times in the eight acrostic psalms, and as five out of fourteen צ key words.

³⁴ On the use of the names of the letters of the alphabet in the acrostics, see Giffone, “A ‘Perfect’ Poem,” 54.

³⁵ Actually, 1:18.

³⁶ This recalls the overt wordplay in Isaiah 5:7, in which משפח (“bloodshed”) is substituted for משפט (“justice”) and צעקה for צדקה.

³⁷ Lee, “Singers of Lamentations,” 44 (emphasis original).

Lee's explanation for the difference of alphabetical order within the book of Lamentations is difficult to prove conclusively, but is more convincing than many other proposals.³⁸

Completeness and Incompleteness Through Literary Artifice

The examples given above demonstrate the relevance of the acrostic form to the interpretation of the book of Lamentations. The acrostic form most fundamentally connotes completeness or wholeness. But the completeness of the acrostic is repeatedly upset, undermined, and thrown into imbalance throughout Lamentations. The acrostic also forms a macrosyntactic structure, which focuses attention on any possible deviation from the rigid form.

Lamentations 1

Lamentations 1 has several features that undermine the acrostic artifice. As discussed above, the chapter is divided roughly into halves of eleven verses each, but Daughter Zion bursts out before her "turn" in 1:9c and 1:11c. "Crossing over" from verses 11 to 12 is a recurring technique in Lamentations that creates an imbalance. Just as Daughter Zion crosses over from her half of the poem into the first half, so the observer-prophetic voice interrupts Daughter Zion's half (1:17).

The MT of 1:7 contains four poetic lines, the only such verse in the entire book. 1:7b is sometimes considered a later insertion (or as having been moved from 1:6a) based on its similarity to 1:10.³⁹ However, 1:7b may be an intentional creation of imbalance between the two halves of the poem. This has the effect of placing the statement of protest in 1:11c at the chiasmic center of the poem—the thirty-fourth poetic line out of sixty-seven.⁴⁰ Of course, other text-critical factors should certainly be taken into account in any decision to emend the text in this manner. But the possibility that the rebellion against the rigid acrostic form is *intentional* should at least be considered.

³⁸ See Giffone, "A 'Perfect' Poem," 55-56. See also the discussion of the correction of the order of ו and ב in Ps 34:16-18 ("A 'Perfect' Poem," 64); if Lee is correct, the presence of וצקרו in Ps 34:18 would account for the "original" inversion of the preceding ו and ב, which was then "corrected" by later scribes in such a way as makes these three lines obscure in their current received form.

³⁹ Westermann (*Lamentations*, 110-112) emends the MT; in *Lamentations* (Brian Doyle, trans.; Leuven: Peeters, 1998) Johan Renkema affirms 1:7b as original (128-29).

⁴⁰ Anthony Ceresko makes a similar observation regarding the absence of a ו line in Psalm 34; see "The ABCs of Wisdom in Psalm XXXIV," *VT* 35 (1985): 100-101.

Like certain other Hebrew acrostics, Lamentations 1 emphasizes the idea of completeness with the repetition of the word כל (“all/each/every”). The acrostic poems of the HB as a set use כל much more frequently than do the non-acrostic psalms.⁴¹ Lamentations 1 exhibits a strong preference for כל:

	כל	Lemmas	%
Non-acrostic Pss	280	22,409	1.25%
All HB Acrostics	110	4,926	2.23%
Ps 145 (outlier?) ⁴²	17	206	8.25%
Lam 1	16	480	3.33%
Lam 2	8	521	1.54%
Lam 3	10	513	1.95%
Lam 4	2	359	0.56%
Lam 5	0	188	0.00%
Lam Total	36	2061	1.75%

Lamentations 2

The second poem of Lamentations is similar enough to the first, but alters the acrostic in certain ways. Each poem contains twenty-two verses of three lines each (1:7b notwithstanding). The two poems share key words at verses 1 (איכה), 5 (היו/היה) and 20 (ראה). Lee points out that in Lamentations 2 the order of פ and ע is reversed, and צדיק is replaced with צעק (2:18).

As with 1:11c, 2:11 appears to cross over the artificial middle of the poem created by the acrostic. 2:1-10 describes YHWH’s barrage against his city and sanctuary from an omniscient third-person perspective. 2:11-19 employs a first-person prophetic voice speaking to Daughter Zion directly. 2:20-22 concludes the poem with Daughter Zion’s appeal to YHWH at the prophet’s urging:

⁴¹ Giffone, “A ‘Perfect’ Poem,” 52n11.

⁴² Psalm 145 appears to compensate for the complete absence of the *qatal* form with repeated use of כל (Giffone, “A ‘Perfect’ Poem,” 72n44).

Lam 2		Speaker	Addressee	Agent
1-9	...	Observer	General	YHWH
10	The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground in silence; They have thrown dust on their heads and put on sackcloth; The young women of Jerusalem have bowed their heads to the ground.			People (Silence!)
11	My eyes are spent with weeping; my stomach churns... ...because infants and babies faint in the streets of the city.	Prophet	Daughter Zion	People, Enemies, YHWH
12-19	12 They cry to their mothers, "Where is bread and wine?" ... 13 What can I say for you, to what compare you, O daughter of Jerusalem? ...			
20-22	20 "Look, O LORD, and see! With whom have you dealt thus?" ...	Daughter Zion	YHWH	YHWH

Lamentations 3

Lamentations 3 is nearly identical to the first two poems in length but distinguishes itself from Lamentations 1-2 by intensifying the acrostic form:⁴³ each of the sixty-six lines now follows the acrostic, with three א lines followed by three ב lines, et cetera. The heightened rigidity of the form draws even more attention to instances of "crossover" between stanzas.⁴⁴

One examples of crossover is found in 3:12-13. 3:10-12 is the א stanza; but the bow-and-arrow metaphor crosses over into the ב stanza:

⁴³ Kathleen O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002), 11.

⁴⁴ Dobbs-Allsopp observes, "The alphabetic acrostic and the qinah metre are at their most demanding in this chapter, and the chapter exhibits the greatest amount of syntactic and semantic enjambment across lines and even across stanzas" ("Tragedy, Tradition and Theology," 48).

	...
ד	3:11 He has turned aside my steps (דָּרַכִּי) and torn me to pieces; he has made me desolate.
ד	3:12 He bent (דָּרַךְ) his bow and set me as a target for his arrow ;
ה	3:13 He drove (הִבִּיאַ) into my kidneys the sons of his quiver .
ה	3:14 I have become (הָיִיתִי) sport for all peoples, their song all day long.
	...

A starker example is found in the ד and ה stanzas. After recounting his many afflictions at YHWH's hand (3:1-20), the (every)man (אִיִּם) turns to hopeful thoughts:

	...
ז	3:20 My soul certainly (זָכוֹר) remembers [my affliction] and is bowed down within me.
ז	3:21 But this (זֶאֱמַר) I revive in my heart, and therefore I hope:
ה	3:22 The covenant love (חֶסֶד־יְיָ) of YHWH—it is never exhausted, nor do his compassions ever end;
ה	3:23 They are renewed (חֲדָשִׁים) every morning; great is your faithfulness.
ה	3:24 ...

The triple-acrostic form accentuates the crossover, which subtly resists the formal constraints of the poem. Even as the artifice struggles to contain the poetic expression, the poet grapples with his own emotions and the constraints of a “good theology” of a righteous sufferer.

Lamentations 4-5

Following the intensification of the acrostic form in Lamentations 3, Lamentations 4 and 5 diminish and finally abandon the acrostic altogether. Lamentations 4 follows the same pattern as 1-2, but with only two lines per stanza. Dobbs-Allsopp notes that 4:22 *completes* the acrostic with the “completion” of Zion's punishment/iniquity (תַּם-עוֹנֶךָ בַּת-צִיּוֹן).⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Dobbs-Allsopp, “Lamentations,” in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible (NOAB)*, Michael D. Coogan, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1177.

Lamentations 5, perhaps like Psalms 16, 29, 32, 33 and 38, is a pseudo-acrostic,⁴⁶ containing twenty-two lines but not achieving acrostic form.⁴⁷ The brevity of the poem (half the length of Lam 4 and one-third as long as Lam 1, 2 and 3) and the abandonment of the acrostic form focus the attention on the desperate plea contained within. Lamentations 5 repeats the “look and see” protest of chapters 1 and 2, but rather than “waiting” for the twentieth verse as chapters 1 and 2 do, 5:1 places this appeal front and center, immediately disrupting any notion of a “proper” acrostic order.

Like chapters 1 and 2, Lamentations 5 contains a crossover between the eleventh and twelfth verses. Amidst the first-person plural description of Judah’s present situation, 5:11-14 interrupts with a third-person litany concerning the suffering of all the different members of society:

Lam 5	Discourse	Speaker	Addressee	Object
1	Appeal	Judahites	YHWH	Judahites (“us”)
2-10	Description	(“we”)		
11		Observer	General	Judahites (“them”)
12-14		Judahites	YHWH	Judahites (“us”)
15-18	(“we”)			
19-22	Appeal			

Perhaps such a progression would be negligible in other poetic discourses, but the juxtaposition with the acrostics makes the crossover of 5:11 notable. The rebellion against the acrostic form, in the fronting of the appeal and the resistance of the “acrostic” divisions, is complete.

The decline and fall of the acrostic in Lamentations 4-5 signals the failure of the book to achieve completeness. Lamentations 1-4 revealed some cracks in the rigid form, but the final chapter, with its stark content and blunt protest revolts completely against any attempt to impose artificial order.

⁴⁶ Giffone, “A ‘Perfect’ Poem,” 56, 72.

⁴⁷ Siegfried Bergler’s claim of having discovered a non-alphabetic acrostic in Lamentations 5 is less than convincing; see “Threni V: nur ein alphabetisierendes Lied? Versuch einer Deutung,” *VT* 27 (1977): 304-20.

Summary

Studies in Lamentations and the other Hebrew acrostics indicate that even within the constraints of the elegant, symmetrical form there is creativity, diversity, resistance and asymmetry.⁴⁸ The use of acrostic form involves imposition of order upon disorder and diversity. The consistent use of such a contrived form in a book about death, chaos, disorder and fragmentation leads the reader to investigate the implications of the form for interpretation.⁴⁹

Fundamentally, the alphabetic acrostic form connotes completeness, submission and wholeness. Variations upon or deviations from that baseline indicate tendencies toward incompleteness, resistance and fragmentation. These variations in form actually serve as part of the “content” of the poem, accentuating certain stanzas, lines, phrases or words.

IV. FRAGMENTED JUDAH IN LAMENTATIONS

This section will examine the evidence of the fragmentation of Judah in each chapter of Lamentations. As in the Sumerian city laments, the city of Judah is personified as a woman deprived of her children.

The first sub-section examines the poetic voices of Lamentations in dialogue, first with one another, and secondly with the Latter Prophets’ use of the marriage metaphor.

The second sub-section explores the different fates of Zion’s children in each chapter of Lamentations. Four categories of Zion’s children are mentioned within Lamentations: those who have been killed in battle or who have died of hunger, those who have been taken captive (*golah*), those who have fled (Diaspora), and those who are left desolate in the land (*she’erit*).

Poetic Voices in Dialogue

Within Lamentations

It is widely noted that Lamentations uses a variety of poetic voices. Gwaltney notes that both Lamentations and the Sumerian city laments use an “interchange of speaker

⁴⁸ In fact, the artificial constraints of the acrostic serve to heighten the creativity of the poet; see Scott N. Callahan, “An Evaluation of Psalm 119 as Constrained Writing,” *Hebrew Studies* 50 (2009): 121-135.

⁴⁹ Dobbs-Allsopp observes, “Lamentations through literary artifice, through language, is able to give meaning where meaning is otherwise absent. Hence, the simple act of helping the community to regain its voice is profoundly theological in its ramification” (“Tragedy, Tradition and Theology,” 58).

involving first, second, and third persons with accompanying change in perspective reminiscent of dramatic or liturgical performance.”⁵⁰ Dobbs-Allsopp draws more specific parallels: the omniscient third-person narrator, the privileged internal observer, and the city personified as a woman. The interplay between the narrator’s perspective and the perspectives of the suffering internal observer and personified city as anguished mother give the poems their emotional depth and breadth.⁵¹

Lanahan⁵² discerns five poetic voices (or “personae”) within Lamentations:

- An observer who approaches the city of Jerusalem only to find it deserted (primarily in Lam 1-2);
- Jerusalem personified as a desolate woman (primarily in Lam 1-2);
- A soldier who has endured hard use in the war (the *geber* of Lam 3);
- A bourgeois figure, somewhat detached like the observer, focusing on the economic and social upheaval in Jerusalem (Lam 4);
- The choral, communal voice (Lam 5).

The use of these five personae, rather than dissolving the unity of the book, enhances the unity of Lamentations in Lanahan’s view. The author/editor of Lamentations is “attempting to grasp a world which is dissolving before his eyes”;⁵³ the different personae “[project] grief in its constituent phases.”⁵⁴ Lanahan also observes that the “passers-by,” found in the first four chapters (1:8, 12; 2:25; 3:14, 63; 4:15), “act as a pivot of recognition in which the reader can swing from the passionate outcries to the detached observations as on a fixed moment in time.”⁵⁵

While some may judge Lanahan’s categorization of the poetic voices in Lamentations to be too precise, he correctly characterizes the range of perspectives within the book. These perspectives range from relatively-disinterested to intimately-affected. The voices are male

⁵⁰ Gwaltney, “Lamentations in Context,” 209.

⁵¹ Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 32-38.

⁵² William F. Lanahan, “The Speaking Voice in the Book of Lamentations,” *JBL* 93 (1974): 41-49.

⁵³ Lanahan, “The Speaking Voice in Lamentations,” 42.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 42. Lanahan wisely refrains from pressing modern psychological understanding of grief too far in his analysis.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

and female, singular and plural. The concerns are those of the elite class and those of the lower classes.

Lee observes that Lamentations' probable origin as oral performance(s) should influence our understanding of the voices and perspectives contained within the poems. She postulates:

The initial poet describes the devastated city of Jerusalem and typically personifies it as a woman (perhaps the poet has been moved by witnessing women suffering around him). Another poet (a woman perhaps moved by his depiction) responds by singing about her individual suffering, loss of children, etc., such that the juxtaposition of their songs and interaction leads to her being identified as "Daughter Zion" (the city personified). Other voices enter the dialogue in Lam 3, and it is unclear whether they might have been part of this direct performance exchange, or offer a response after some time delay. An oral poetic approach further suggests that songs composed and arising out of this communal dirge/lament context might have been sung/composed *line by line*, and later resung by other singers in the group, as in refrains (thus much repetition), likely involving oral modification as they continue to be sung. In any case a scribe eventually crystallized two lead singers in dialogue and may also be the compiler who added the later singers' utterances.⁵⁶

Lee characterizes these two "lead singers" as Jeremiah (noting the similarities between this prophetic voice and that of the prophet) and Daughter Zion. Though in the Latter Prophets (Jer 4:31 and elsewhere) Zion is portrayed as an unfaithful wife deserving punishment (see discussion below), in Lamentations Zion's voice moves the prophetic voice to empathize with her suffering,⁵⁷ and later on, to participate in the lament/appeal with her.⁵⁸

Lee's analysis provides warrant for viewing Lamentations as a uniting of two different theological perspectives on the destruction of Jerusalem. Those who emphasized Judah's own culpability in own demise and those who emphasized YHWH's role are brought together to grieve and to petition YHWH. This is an oversimplification of the two positions which in fact overlap to some degree: the Jeremiah-voice does acknowledge YHWH's excessive actions against his people (e.g. 2:17), while Daughter Zion admits her own guilt (e.g. 1:18). But the plurality of voices gives the book a theological breadth and makes it capable of bringing together people of different theological views.

⁵⁶ Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 42-43 (emphasis original).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 129, 161.

The plurality of voices and perspectives within Lamentations gives voice to fragmented constituencies of Judah during the exile; different classes, genders and theological emphases are represented. The diversity allows the book to perform a unifying function in the community, which will be examined in Section V below.

Lamentations and the Prophets: The Marriage Metaphor and Zion's Children

Mandolfo,⁵⁹ Lee⁶⁰ and others have noted the dialogic relationship of Lamentations with certain books of the Latter Prophets. Mandolfo sets Daughter Zion's voice in Lamentations as an equal dialogue partner with Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The biblical metaphor through which she sets the biblical texts in tension is the marriage metaphor—specifically as it takes shape in Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2-3 and 13, and Ezekiel 16 and 23. Zion has been an unfaithful wife to YHWH; YHWH responds by afflicting Zion and hedging her in on every side until she has no choice but to return to him. Mandolfo notes the savvy use of the marriage/unfaithfulness metaphor in the Prophets, who exploit the insecurities of their “elite male audience.” Casting Israel/Judah as an unfaithful wife presents the male elites with a dilemma:

[They are] compelled to embrace fully their chastisement if they want to maintain their position of power in the status quo. If they protest that their treatment is unjust, then they open the door to those lower on the hierarchical ladder to do the same.⁶¹

Mandolfo adds, however, that even in the Prophets' story the adulterous wife's perspective contains an implicit indictment of YHWH's performance as a faithful husband.⁶² This indictment of YHWH as husband emerges in Mandolfo's interpretation of Lamentations. In Lamentations, she contends, Daughter Zion constructs a counterstory that will reshape and respond to God's story.⁶³

Mandolfo's presentation of Lamentations as deconstruction of YHWH's story is compelling. Within the metaphor, however, it is interesting to note that Lamentations never

⁵⁹ Carleen Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007). Some of the following summary and analysis of Mandolfo's work has been presented previously in Giffone, “How Lonely Sits the Text,” 7-13.

⁶⁰ Lee, *Singers of Lamentations*, 85.

⁶¹ Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*, 31.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 34-35.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

addresses the paternity of Zion's children. With the backdrop of Hosea 1-3, one would think that YHWH's compassion for his own children would be a key point of Zion's appeal, and yet there is none. The presence of the marriage/unfaithfulness metaphor in Lamentations 1-2 leads to the inference that Zion's children are children of whoredom.

Additionally, Lamentations contains several possible allusions to the test of unfaithfulness in Numbers 5. At her punishment Zion's "stomach churns" (1:20, 2:11) and her "bile is poured out" on the ground (2:11). In 3:15 the (apparently masculine) speaker remarks that YHWH has "filled me with bitterness." The punishment for unfaithfulness in Numbers 5 seems to be the miscarriage of an illegitimate child as well as barrenness.⁶⁴ The death and abuse of Zion's children is a prominent punishment (and basis for Zion's complaint) in Lamentations (1:5, 15, 16, 18; 2:11, 19-21; 4:2, 4, 10; 5:11-13). If "precious things" (מְקַמְדִים) is analogous to "genitals" in chapter 1,⁶⁵ its occurrence in 2:4 may also indicate a punishment of barrenness or miscarriage:

ויהרג כל מחמדי־עיני

באהל בת־ציון שפך כאש חמתו

2:4b He has killed everything "precious-to-sight;"

2:4c In the "tent" of Daughter Zion he poured out
his fury like fire.

These factors—the lack of evidence that YHWH is the father of Zion's children, and the allusions to the test of unfaithfulness—indicate that Zion's children are in fact children of whoredom, the illegitimate children of Zion's lovers.

The substance of Zion's appeal is twofold: 1) have compassion on your wife and her children, even though they are not your children; and 2) punish the nations who have abused your family (1:10, 21-22; 2:15-18, 22). If indeed the marriage metaphor should be part of the interpretive foreground of Lamentations, Zion's children become an important part of that metaphor. The questionable paternity of Zion's children undermines Zion's basis for protest, putting the overall theology of the book into a more traditional covenantal framework.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Dennis Olson, *Numbers* (Interpretation Commentary Series; Louisville: John Knox, 1996), 36-37.

⁶⁵ See F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp and Tod Linafelt, "The Rape of Zion in Thr 1,10," ZAW 113 (2001): 77-81.

⁶⁶ Salters writes, "Yahweh must be confronted with the affliction he has caused, not only in the fall of Jerusalem but in the ongoing 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" (*Lamentations*, 28).

Communities

Lamentations 1

Lamentations 1 is directly focused on the city of Jerusalem, personified as Daughter Zion. However, this does not necessarily limit the drama to a particular spatial location; “Judah” has gone into exile and dwells among the nations (1:3), yet Daughter Zion still sits desolate within the city (1:12). The Judahite people, Zion’s children, experience a variety of fates.

Lamentations 1 utilizes two voices: a third-person poetic narrator (1-9b, 10-11b, 17) and Daughter Zion (9c, 11c-16, 18-22). Both of these perspectives speak of the entirety and indiscriminacy of the destruction of Judah.

The narrator describes the sufferings of priests (1:4), young women (1:4), children (1:5), princes (1:6), and the people (עַם) as a collective (1:7, 11). Daughter Zion speaks of her warriors and young men (1:15), desolate children (1:16), young men and women (1:18), and priests and elders (1:19). Her suffering as a personification of the community extends to her entire body: nakedness (1:8), genitals (1:7, 8, 10⁶⁷), bones and feet (1:13), neck (1:14), eyes (1:16), bowels (1:20), and heart (1:20, 22).

Furthermore, the attack has scattered the community. Children, young people and Judah herself have gone into exile or captivity (1:3, 5, 7, 18). Many have perished in the city or the countryside (1:15, 19-20). A surviving *she’erit* lives among the ruins (1:4), while princes have fled in search of protection elsewhere (1:6).

Lamentations 2

Lamentations 2 begins with a barrage of attack by YHWH against Zion and her sanctuary. 2:1-8 is composed almost exclusively of YHWH’s actions in Zion’s destruction. YHWH’s actions leave only a few survivors: “rulers” are dishonored (2:2); by implication there are those who “lament” (2:5); “king and priest” are “spurned” (2:6) and are now “among the nations” (2:9); prophets no longer see visions (2:9c), and elders are silent in the dust (2:10).

Lamentations 2:11-22 is primarily an account of the survivors and dead in Jerusalem (not the exiles to Babylon). Even though “none escaped or survived” (2:22), the survivors

⁶⁷ Ibid.

include starving children (2:11c-12, 19c), desolate and grieving mothers (2:12, 19-20), and discredited prophets (2:14). The dead are priests and prophets (2:20), and young men, young women and elders (2:21).

Lamentations 3

Lamentations 3:1-33 represents a shift in focus away from the personified city to the sufferings of the *geber*, a male individual who suffered greatly in the destruction. The descriptions of his various afflictions could be interpreted as representative of the community as a whole.

The second half of the poem is oriented toward the community, including a prayer of penitence and imprecation (3:40-66). *Golah* captives are alluded to (3:34, 45, 52), as are the dead of war (3:43) and the oppressed *she'erit* (3:35, 51).

Lamentations 3, rather than focusing on the totality and indiscriminacy of the destruction, takes a measured, wisdom-centered approach to suffering. This is the most penitential of the poems in Lamentations, which has led many scholars to date the poem later and connect it with the genre of penitential prayers (see discussion below).

Lamentations 4

Zion's children experience several different fates in Lamentations 4. In addition to those who have perished in the war (4:5-6), many survivors have starved (4:3-4, 9-10). A *she'erit* community includes starving babies (4:4) as well as debased princes (4:7-8).

Lamentations 4:14-16 appears to refer to the *golah* and Diaspora communities, living disgraced in Babylon and abroad. These Judahites included "priests" and "elders" whom YHWH had scattered (4:16), but they were considered "unclean," "fugitives" and "wanderers" (4:15). 4:20 describes the king, "YHWH's anointed," as having been captured and taken into exile with some of the people.

Lamentations 4:17-19 describes the attempts to escape Jerusalem into the hill country and the neighboring nations. Lamentations 4:21-22 invokes punishment upon Edom. Edom is repeatedly singled out for condemnation in the Prophets for failing to come to Judah's aid and mistreating the Judahite refugees (Ezek 25, 35; Joel 3:19; Amos 1:11; Obad 11).

Like the first two poems, Lamentations 4 mentions a wide swath of people who suffer indiscriminately: infants and children (4:4, 10), the wealthy (4:5), princes (4:7), women (4:10), prophets, priests and elders (4:13, 16).

Lamentations 5

Lamentations 5 focuses YHWH's attention sharply on the situation of the *she'erit* community, the remnant still in Judah. The complaint centers on the oppression of the community by foreigners.

Though there is no direct reference to the *golah* community, its absence is keenly felt in the lack of a ruling class to keep order and justice. The land is now owned by foreign patricians (5:2), on whom the working class must now rely for sustenance (5:4, 6, 8-9). There is no לַאֲלֹהִים to redeem the oppressed (5:3, 8); wealthy men of strength are either dead (5:7) or enslaved (5:12, 14). YHWH, eternally enthroned (5:19), is the lone hope of the *she'erit* community, a hope portrayed in (perhaps *golah*) terms as שׁוֹב קֶדֶם ("return [from] the east," 5:21).

Summary

Through its use of different voices and its focus on the suffering of many different communities and classes of people, Lamentations gives voice to a fragmented people. By including different personal testimonies of suffering and theological perspectives on Judah's destruction, Lamentations has a unifying effect on the community.

Lamentations, like the psalms of communal lament considered in chapter three (§IV), appears to treat the various communities of scattered Judah as *equally* important members of the community. Though these psalms and the poems of Lamentations describe in detail the desolation of the land and its remaining inhabitants, those who have fled or been exiled are mourned as equal victims of the destruction.

V. RHETORICAL FUNCTIONS OF LAMENTATIONS

Sections III and IV of this chapter sought to establish that Lamentations in both form and content speaks of and to a fragmented community. This chapter will examine the unifying rhetorical function of Lamentations within the exilic and postexilic communities and beyond. The first sub-section will compare two approaches to perpetuating the religious tradition of Judah found in Lamentations. The second sub-section will examine the rhetorical applications of a de-historicized book of Lamentations.

Community Reconstitution

A primary purpose of a communal lament, as discussed in chapter three, is to give voice to a suffering group in the sight of the public and the deity. The way in which the oppressed community vocalizes its complaint will shape the future of that community as the deity or broader public is mobilized, whether to act on the sufferers' behalf or to silence the protesters.

Lamentations, by utilizing diverse perspectives, voices and settings in its complaint, draws several different sorts of possible futures for the Judahite communities. Dobbs-Allsopp and Boda have examined the rhetorical strategies of Lamentations 2 and 3, respectively. Interestingly, though these poems of protest differ in perspective, voice and rhetorical strategy, they appear to propose/envision futures for Judah that are similar in important respects. Lamentations 2 and 3 point to a "portable" future for the Zion tradition—that is, a future that is not tied to a particular temple or land.

In "R(az/ais)ing Zion in Lamentations 2," Dobbs-Allsopp explores the nature and structure of Zion's protest in the second poem.⁶⁸ He argues that one of the goals of the Lamentations poet is to perpetuate the Zion tradition, one of the strongest traditions in Israel's history, even in the wake of the Zion's destruction.

In Lamentations 2, the poet attempts this preservation in two steps. First, he offers a stark account of the complete *razing* of "the city, its temple, and supporting mythologies" by YHWH himself (2:1-8). Next, through "vocativity" (2:13-19) and "defiant vocality" (2:20-22), the poet *raises* Zion into the position of ongoing protest.⁶⁹ The ongoing fact of Zion's humiliation now cries out against YHWH, thus preserving a more "portable" Zion tradition in the exile/Diaspora:

The Zion at the outset of Lamentations 2 (material Zion, the Zion of temple and cult, the place of divine habitation memorialized in the songs of Zion) is razed and demolished and at poem's end replaced by a different kind of Zion—a Zion of the mind and text who nevertheless through impersonation maintains a site for divinity, whose speaking voice tokens survival and preserves and sustains the ever-fragile trace of her formal architectural self until such a time in the future as geography and architecture can once again channel divinity.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Dobbs-Allsopp, "R(az/ais)ing Zion in Lamentations 2," 21-68. Some of the following discussion and analysis was presented previously in Giffone, "How Lonely Sits the Text," 7.

⁶⁹ Dobbs-Allsopp, "R(az/ais)ing Zion in Lamentations 2," 21.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

In the essay, “The Priceless Gain of Penitence,” Boda seeks a helpful model for contemporary religious expression by examining the progression of exilic and postexilic liturgical expressions. He compares two exilic/postexilic forms of liturgical expression: the penitential prayer (e.g., Ezra 9; Neh 1, 9; Dan 9; cf Ps 106) and the lament (quintessentially, the book of Lamentations), and tries to demonstrate how the latter led to the formation of the former.

By outlining the key elements of penitential prayers and laments, Boda highlights similarities and dissimilarities between the two forms. Penitential prayers are intended to “bring an end to the devastating effects of the fall of the state: either to captivity, oppression, or the sorry condition of Palestine,”⁷¹ and are characterized by:

- Expression of distress;
- Emotional depth;
- Request for divine modification in disposition;
- Appeal to promise;
- Theological “credo”: the greatness and graciousness of YHWH;
- Law used negatively as basis for punishment;
- Law used positively as path for covenant renewal and therefore community restoration.

Boda asserts that the tradition can be traced as early as the Persian period; he finds allusions to Nehemiah 9 in the speeches of the prose inclusio of Zechariah 1-8.⁷² The poems of Lamentations (especially 1-2, 4-5) are characterized by:

- Appeal to personal experience;
- Cynical approach to the sin of former generations (5:7);
- Consistency in liturgical form (lament, admission of sin) and ideology (Zion theology).

Elements held in common by both forms include:

- Malediction;

⁷¹ Boda, “The Priceless Gain of Penitence,” 83.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 85.

- Request for divine recognition of distress;
- Admission of sin;
- Intergenerational consequences of sin.

He contrasts the penitential prayers with Lamentations 1-2 and 4-5 in the following respects:

- Lamentations regularly employs malediction against enemies, a technique absent from penitential prayer;
- Lamentations has more vivid and extensive descriptions of distress, whereas penitential prayers pay more attention to the admission of guilt;
- Lamentations hesitates to incorporate the foolishness of former generations into a communal guilt, as penitential prayer does;
- God's mercy and his Law are nearly absent in Lamentations but are major themes in penitential prayers.⁷³

Boda tries to discover the organic connection between the two, using Lamentations 3 (a "minority voice" in Lamentations) as a sort of mediating form, "the greatest point of contact with these later expressions."⁷⁴ In Lamentations 3 the Zion tradition "recedes into the background" in favor of a penitential emphasis on "grace apart from Zion."⁷⁵ The Zion tradition was thought to be unsustainable in the exile/Diaspora after the destruction of the temple, the death of the king and the capture of Jerusalem. Thus, the Zion tradition in Lamentations 3 is "muted."⁷⁶

These two analyses seem incompatible initially: Dobbs-Allsopp argues that Lamentations 2 attempts to make the Zion tradition more portable and enduring, while Boda argues that Lamentations 3 points to a penitential tradition apart from a non-portable Zion tradition. What the two arguments share, however, is a focus on *portability* of tradition in the exile/Diaspora. With its members scattered in Babylon, Edom and Egypt, Judah looked for ways to perpetuate its identity. Since both the Zion tradition (with its hope for restoration of

⁷³ Ibid., 89-90.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 95.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 96. Contra Dobbs-Allsopp, Boda views the Zion tradition primarily as an election tradition rather than as an ethical vision (96n57); cf. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy, Tradition and Theology," 46-47.

⁷⁶ Boda, "The Priceless Gain of Penitence," 96.

the temple, land and monarchy) and the penitential tradition are found in Babylonian- and Persian-era literature, it is not surprising that both traditions would be present in Lamentations.

Timelessness and Portability

In some sense “timelessness” and “portability” are merely inherent properties of language, particularly of poetic language. The general purpose of poetry is to convey a sentiment or idea through the use of elevated or distanciating language⁷⁷—a sentiment or idea which transcends the immediate experience of the poet and touches the experience of the reader/hearer.

Certain sorts of discourse (poetry, stylized prose) are clearly more adaptable or “portable” than others (narrative, census lists).⁷⁸ Each discourse has its own limited potential to communicate and its own range of appropriate contexts. Adaptability of a discourse is dependent upon the genre, language, and intended purpose of the discourse. Adaptability is also contingent upon the degree to which the meaning of the discourse depends on the medium, style, language, and other features.

Most of the analysis of Lamentations presented to this point presupposes intentionality at various stages of the text’s development—in the composition, oral performance, transcription, editing and collection. Yet authorial intent has only limited impact on interpretation and appropriation. Hildebidle exposes the “intentional fallacy” in a short essay on poetry and interpretation:

“The distinguished poet Joe Schmoe suffered through a difficult marriage, which ended in an acrimonious divorce. As a result of this, many of his poems are *about* the stresses and pains of broken or betrayed love.” Who cares? And how can a poet presume his/her readers will be willing to consult some thick biography, or even an encyclopedia, in order to understand his/her sonnet? There may well be a (supposed) biographical point of origin for a poem, and it may be (for your own reasons) interesting to you to try to find out what that point of origin is.

⁷⁷ See Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 1-14, esp. 5-6; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 9, 76.

⁷⁸ For example: the English song, “Happy Birthday,” has a wide range of appropriate and sensible contexts (any English-speaking person’s birthday celebration, constituted by the birthday-boy or -girl, and usually at least two others singing together). By contrast, a note containing a grocery list has a very narrow range of appropriate contexts (informing a husband of the things his wife would like him to pick up from the store on his way home).

But the primary source of information by and about a poem is the poem itself. So the question really is, “What does the poem say (or suggest) it is about?”

...We’ll never know, and have no way to uncover, what was going through Wordsworth’s mind as he wrote a particular line. We can sometimes try to *deduce* this, but it’s mostly a hopeless swamp. What we can pursue is what the *line* means to an intelligent, informed reader; and what the *poem* in which the line occurs seems to mean or discuss or propose. And we pursue that by looking, with scrupulous care, at particular words and arrangements of words on the page.⁷⁹

Hildebidle does not completely discount any attempt to situate a text in history. Rather, his essay is a reminder that poetry has life and meaning apart from its original author/context. Lamentations, like all other canonical scripture, has been subject to appropriation, interpretation and application in many other contexts than that of Judah in the aftermath of 587 BCE.

Historical References

Lamentations, though it describes the aftermath of an historical event, contains few explicit historical references. Lamentations 1:8 contains a veiled reference to the Babylonians: “For she has seen nations enter her holy place, [nations] of which you commanded, ‘They must not enter your sanctuary.’”⁸⁰ Lamentations 4:21-22 condemns Edom, but the nature of Edom’s offense is not made explicit. Lamentations 5:6 laments the necessity of soliciting food and provision from Egypt and Asshur.

Perhaps the book of Lamentations veils any reference to the Babylonians for fear of reprisal.⁸¹ Yet Psalm 137, apparently “an immediate reaction to disaster” by the *golah*

⁷⁹ John Hildebidle, “How Does a Poem Mean?”

<http://web.mit.edu/lit/www/dutchiamb/howdoesapoemmean.html> (accessed 23 February 2010), emphasis original.

⁸⁰ In his commentary on Deuteronomy (Philadelphia: Jewish Publications Society, 1996), Jeffrey Tigay explains: “Since the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, who are not mentioned in Deuteronomy 23:4-9, Lamentations evidently assumes that the four nations that *are* mentioned in Deuteronomy 23:4-9 stand for *all* foreigners” (478, emphasis original). These nations are Moab and Ammon (MT 23:4-7), and Edom and Egypt (MT 23:8-9).

⁸¹ Jeremiah (25:26 and 51:41) veils a reference to the king of Babylon through use of an *atbash* (אֶתְבַּשׁ) cipher: אֶתְבַּשׁ becomes אֶשְׁבַּשׁ.

community, does not hesitate to imprecate Babylon (or Edom) in the harshest of terms.⁸² One effect of Lamentations' lack of historical references, whether intentional or unintentional, is that the book becomes applicable across many contexts as an expression of grief, anger and despair. Lamentations is not unique in this regard, however; many other lament psalms are vague or unspecific regarding their particular historical circumstances.

Ahistorical Approaches

Joyce discusses different sorts of ways Lamentations can be used apart from its historical context.⁸³ He identifies four categories of ahistorical approaches: liturgical, psychological, literary and ideological. The study of these approaches, Joyce explains, is intended not to displace but to complement historical-critical examination of Lamentations.⁸⁴

Liturgical

In addition to its possible liturgical use at the site of the destroyed temple (see §II.D above), Lamentations is traditionally read in the synagogue on the Ninth of Av to commemorate the destruction of the temple; this liturgical use may have been part of the book's origins.⁸⁵ Yet long after the temple was rebuilt and destroyed again, Lamentations played a key role in "articulating corporate Jewish identity and memory in a whole sequence of tragic situations in the story of the Jews down through the centuries."⁸⁶ The Targum of Lamentations (TgLam) claims that YHWH mourned the fall of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from Eden using Lamentations (TgLam 1:1). TgLam also associates Lamentations with the weeping of the children of Israel when they reject the offer of the Promised Land in Numbers 14:1 (TgLam 1:2), the death of Josiah (TgLam 1:18; 4:20), the Roman conquest of Jerusalem in 70 CE (TgLam 1:19), the martyrdom of the prophet Zechariah (TgLam 2:20), and several other historical events all the way up to the seventh century CE.⁸⁷

⁸² Jill Middlemas, *The Templeless Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 38.

⁸³ Paul M. Joyce, "Sitting Loose to History: Reading the Book of Lamentations Without Primary Reference to Its Original Historical Setting," in E. Ball, ed., *In Search of True Wisdom: Essays in Old Testament Interpretation in Honour of Ronald E. Clements* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 246-62.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 259-62.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 248-49.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁸⁷ Christian M.M. Brady, *The Rabbinic Targum of Lamentations: Vindicating God* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 127-31, 155-67.

This indicates, Joyce concludes, that Lamentations became “a vehicle for communal and personal devotion.”⁸⁸ A liturgical reading is “a loosening of the moorings of the text within ancient history.” Since the referent of the text—God—is transcendent, the reading of the text transcends time and place.⁸⁹ Cohen likewise affirms that the Rabbinic interpretations of Lamentations were not terribly concerned with the historical setting of the book, but instead looked for an overarching paradigm for understanding sin, suffering and divine retribution.⁹⁰ He explains:

The rabbis saw in Lamentations not a time-bound book describing the unique events of 587 BCE but a timeless book setting forth the eternal paradigm of Jewish suffering...The book is a lament for the past and a prophetic warning for the future much like the warning sermons of Moses (Lev 26 and Deut 28). Just as the Ninth of Av was a day of catastrophe for the Jews for all time, so to Lamentations, the liturgical reading for the Ninth of Av, was the eternal lament for all Jewish catastrophes, past, present, and future.⁹¹

Childs contends that this application of Lamentations does not detract from the book’s historic character, but rather secures its ongoing influence down through history:

The effect of the canonical process on the book of Lamentations was not one of dehistoricizing the fully time-conditioned response of the survivors of the destruction of Jerusalem. Rather, the response was brought in to relationship with a dimension of faith which provided a religious context from which to seek meaning in suffering. One of the results of incorporating the events of the city's destruction into Israel's traditional terminology of worship was to establish a semantic bridge between the historical situation of the early sixth century and the language of faith which struggles with divine judgment. For this reason the book of Lamentations serves every successive generation of the suffering faithful for whom history has become unbearable.⁹²

Psychological

⁸⁸ Joyce, “Sitting Loose to History,” 249.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁹⁰ Shaye J.D. Cohen, “The Destruction: From Scripture to Midrash,” *Prooftexts* 2 (1982): 17-39.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

⁹² Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 596.

Lamentations provides a way to deal with grief and loss in many different contexts.⁹³ Mintz examines the rhetorical devices used in Lamentations to address three dilemmas of the Destruction: the collective nature of the event, the utter violation of the covenant relationship between Israel and YHWH, and the role of poetic language and perspective.⁹⁴ He writes:

Ancient writers, no more than their successors, were denied the possibility of transcribing directly an unaffectedly the authentic cry of human pain in the purity of its original expression.⁹⁵ If the Book of Lamentations does indeed exhude [sic] a sense of primal outrage, it is only because its authors labored and schemed to exploit in new ways the devices of language available to them in order to mount a successful literary representation of primal outrage.⁹⁶

Mintz shows how the personification of Israel (both as Daughter Zion and as the *geber* of Lam 3) creates empathy for the victim in the face of her persecutor: YHWH himself. He argues that YHWH's refusal to answer, another rhetorical technique, is what makes the book a lament—a self-fabricated and self-administered comfort—rather than a consolation. These techniques permit Lamentations to be appropriated in any context as an expression of pain, anguish and anger toward God. Joyce adds that Lamentations' diversity of perspectives on pain is consistent with what modern psychology has to say about the way humans react to loss.⁹⁷

Literary

Joyce cautiously celebrates the contributions of literary approaches to the study of Lamentations in the latter half of the twentieth century. The influence of the “linguistic turn” on biblical studies has moved interpretation “away from the notion of fixed and precise meaning, defined as the original meaning or even the author's intention, to a recognition of openness of meaning in biblical material.”⁹⁸ The present study is obviously greatly indebted to literary studies of Lamentations, particularly those that focus on the performative and

⁹³ Joyce, “Sitting Loose to History,” 250-52.

⁹⁴ Alan Mintz, “The Rhetoric of Lamentations and the Representation of Catastrophe,” *Prooftexts* 2 (1982): 1-17.

⁹⁵ There are no words sufficient to describe such pain (*Ibid.*, 1)

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁹⁷ Joyce, “Sitting Loose to History,” 250; see also Joyce, “Lamentations and the Grief Process: A Psychological Reading,” *BibInt* 1 (1993): 304-20.

⁹⁸ Joyce, “Sitting Loose to History,” 252.

rhetorical nature of the book (e.g., the preceding section on Lamentations 2 and 3, or the discussion of lament as protest in Ch. 3 §II.B), intertextuality with the Prophets (see earlier discussion of the work of Lee and Mandolfo in this chapter, as well as Chapter 5), and discourse-analysis (especially §III of this chapter).

Lamentations is not unique as an object of fruitful literary study in the age of postmodernism and radical historicism.⁹⁹ Yet Lamentations appears to lend itself more naturally to “ahistorical” literary study than certain other works of biblical literature. Poetry, more than prose or other forms of discourse, is multivalent and ambiguous. Lamentations in particular—with its anonymity of composition, its rigid artificial form, its plurality of voices, its intertextuality with other Hebrew scripture, and its “shock value”—is ripe for deconstructive and destabilizing readings.

It is certainly the case that not all literary approaches are of equal value for interpretation. In comparison with other ahistorical readings of Lamentations, literary approaches are quite recent and have not enjoyed nearly as wide an application as liturgical and personal readings.¹⁰⁰

Ideological

Ideological approaches to Lamentations seem to go in two directions: ideological deconstruction of the book, or adaptation of the book to serve an ideology.

The Targum of Lamentations is an early example of the latter approach. The historical question of Lamentations is fundamentally the tension between the Abrahamic and Davidic promises and Judah’s exilic situation. While MT Lamentations leaves open the possibility that YHWH might have gone too far, TgLam settles the question quite decisively in YHWH’s favor. Brady explains:

Where the Book of Lamentations is an expression of grief and an outpouring of pain with little concern for maintaining a systematic theology, TgLam is concerned with vindicating God, acquitting the LORD of any perceived guilt, and bringing Lamentations into line with contemporary rabbinic theological beliefs. It also sought to direct its audience to proper rabbinic worship through repentance and the study of Mishnah and Torah.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ In “How Lonely Sits the Text,” this author explores the great value of postmodern readings of the HB from an evangelical perspective, with certain caveats.

¹⁰⁰ Joyce, “Sitting Loose to History,” 262.

¹⁰¹ Brady, *The Rabbinic Targum of Lamentations*, 134.

Joyce summarizes the ahistorical ideological reading of Alice Miller along different lines: Lamentations as a protest against child abuse in modern societies.¹⁰² In contrast to TgLam's interpretation, Linafelt offers a reading of Lamentations 1-2 that pulls interpretive focus away from quiet, penitential suffering as presented in Lamentations 3 and as accentuated by the rabbinic readings. Linafelt demonstrates how the idea of protest in Lamentations 1-2 can be a strategy for reckoning with suffering in the modern age.¹⁰³ Mandolfo uses those same chapters to deconstruct the penitential theology of the Prophets.¹⁰⁴ These three modern ideological readings apply a postmodern "ethic" of tolerance to a book that, from an historical perspective, does not seem to be concerned with such an ethic.

Summary

Lamentations, partly by design and partly by interpretive creativity, is a portable and adaptable basis for tradition. Its portable literary features make the book a valuable tool for preserving community unity in adversity in contexts beyond its original historical setting. Even though other biblical texts are adaptable by tradition in various other settings, Lamentations has quite easily stood outside of historical place and time to speak to and for the faith communities.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has asserted that Lamentations, by design and by appropriation, contributes to community cohesion amid disaster. Furthermore, Lamentations, by design and by appropriation, is an adaptable piece of literature that contributed to a portable religious and social tradition.

The "success" of Lamentations—as liturgy, as expression of grief, and as instrument of community cohesion—is partly due to the literary skill of its creator(s), and partly due to hermeneutics. Whether or not the creator(s) of Lamentations had a grand vision of an eschatological restoration of the Judahite community, the book's themes, motifs and features lent themselves to such adaptation and appropriation in the aftermath of 587 BCE and beyond.

¹⁰² Joyce, "Sitting Loose to History," 255-56.

¹⁰³ Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*.

¹⁰⁴ Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets*.

Lamentations' most "portable" feature is its diversity. In form and content the reader/audience is confronted with completeness—a nation's complete destruction, the complete range of human emotion—and with incompleteness—a fragmented people, broken institutions, unanswered theological questions.

The next chapter will examine the different ways in which Judahite communities dealt with these problems, using expressions of protest, grief and theological crisis like those found in Lamentations to map a way forward post-catastrophe.

CHAPTER 5

INTERTEXTUALITY BETWEEN LAMENTATIONS AND PERSIAN-ERA TEXTS

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the restorative goals of Babylonian- and Persian-era Hebrew texts and the possible role of the book of Lamentations in restoration projects. In keeping with the theme of this study thus far, particular attention will be paid to the fragmentation of scattered Judahite communities.

First, historical evidence and biblical sources will be examined briefly in order to establish the sectarian concerns and restoration goals of Persian-era Yahwistic expressions. The focus will be narrower than that of chapter two, which sought to establish the ubiquity of the concern for fragmented Judah during this period.

Second, the role of Lamentations will be considered in connection to certain texts of this period and the goals reflected in them. Lamentations is of particular relevance to the (early) restoration goals of Isaiah 40-55,¹ as well as the later penitential expressions in the Persian and Hellenistic eras.² Using the principles of intertextuality established in chapter one, this section will attempt to establish the extent of Lamentations' influence on these texts.

¹ Patricia Tull Willey, *Remember the Former Things: The Recollection of Previous Texts in Second Isaiah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997); Norman K. Gottwald, "Social Class and Ideology in Isaiah 40-55: An Eagletonian Reading," *Semeia* 59 (1992): 43-57.

² Mark J. Boda, "The Priceless Gain of Penitence: From Communal Lament to Penitential Prayer in the 'Exilic' Liturgy of Israel," 81-101 in N. C. Lee and C. Mandolfo, eds., *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts* (Atlanta: SBL, 2008); *ibid.*, *Praying the Tradition: The Origin and Use of Tradition in Nehemiah 9* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999); *ibid.*, "Form Criticism in Transition: Penitential Prayer and Lament, *Sitz im Leben* and Form," in Mark Boda, Daniel Falk and Rodney Werline, eds., *Seeking the Favor of God, Volume 1: The Origins of Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism* (Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 181-92; Richard Bauckham, *Developments in Genre Between Post-Exilic Penitential Prayers and the Psalms of Communal Lament* (Atlanta: SBL, 2003).

II. SECTARIAN CONCERNS IN PERSIAN-ERA TEXTS

Chapter two of this study explored the history of Israel and the worship of YHWH during the eras of Babylonian and Persian domination. The fragmentation of Judah and the separate development of Judahite communities in Mesopotamia, Yehud and Egypt is well-established in the literature.

That chapter alluded briefly to the conflict between the returning *golah* contingency and the *she'erit* community as reflected in *golah*-oriented texts such as Ezra-Nehemiah. This section returns once again to this issue, but with an orientation toward the embedding of this conflict in the literature of the Persian period. This section cannot be a complete treatment of the sectarian concerns of Persia-era texts; rather, a few examples are given in order to frame the examination of Lamentations' application in this period.

Conflict in Yehud

Jonker summarizes what is known from non-HB sources concerning the possible rivalry between Benjamin and Judah during this period. While the border between Benjamin and Judah likely changed over the centuries, it appears that the city of Jerusalem itself suffered greatly at the hands of the Babylonians, whereas Benjamin seems to have done relatively well. Mizpah, an important Benjaminite city, rose to greater prominence after Jerusalem fell. When the *golah* Judahites began to return, Jerusalem rose in regional prominence once again.³

Examples

This tension between Judah and Benjamin, as Jonker and others have demonstrated, is reflected in the Pentateuch, the DtrH, and Chronicles.⁴ The final forms of these texts favor Judah in most instances, but Benjamin is frequently portrayed with sympathy as Judah's (near-)equal in prominence.

³ Louis C. Jonker, "Of Jebus, Jerusalem and Benjamin: The Chronicler's *Sondergut* in 1 Chronicles 21 against the Background of the Late Persian Era in Yehud" (Paper for the 2010 annual meeting of the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies), 4-6.

⁴ See also Jonker, "Textual Identities in the Books of Chronicles: The Case of Jehoram's History," 197-217 in Gary N. Knoppers and Kenneth A. Ristau, eds., *Community Identity in Judean Historiography: Biblical and Comparative Perspectives* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009).

- In Genesis 43-44, Judah assumes leadership over his eleven brothers. Though Benjamin's life is apparently threatened by Joseph's maneuvering, twice Judah pledges his own life to protect Benjamin's.
- Though Judah leads the other tribes against Benjamin in a civil war (Judg 20:18), the Dtr laments the exclusion of Benjamin from Israel (Judg 21:3, 12) and carefully provides for his reintegration (Judg 21:23).
- Though David wins the throne from Saul and his clan, Dtr is careful to emphasize the close friendship between David and Jonathan (1 Sam 18:1-3), as well as David's kindness to Jonathan's offspring (2 Sam 9).
- In the Dtr's account of the NK's secession from Solomon/Rehoboam, it is repeatedly stated that ten northern tribes rebel under Jeroboam, and only one tribe is left to Rehoboam for David's sake. Benjamin is not mentioned; it is possible that this border tribe switched its allegiance one or more times prior to the exile.
- Knoppers notes that Chronicles gives Judah and Benjamin nearly equal prominence in the genealogies.⁵ Chronicles also omits the civil war of Judges 19-21 and largely ignores the reign of Saul.⁶

These texts may reflect a postexilic attempt to bring the *she'erit* of Benjaminite decent back into alliance with the Judahite *golah* returnees in Jerusalem.

The book of Zechariah may also reflect the uneasy relationship between postexilic Benjamin and Judah. The *golah* community is urged to flee Babylon and return to Yehud (2:6-12; 5:5-11; 6:15). The envisioned city of Jerusalem restored will be so populous that it will have no walls; Judah and Benjamin together will constitute a single entity. Though Jerusalem is the only place for proper worship of YHWH (2:11-12; 8:20-23; 14:9, 16-21), Benjamin and even tribes of the NK are invited. ("Israel" in 1:19, 8:13, "Bethel" in 7:2; "Ephraim" in 9:13, 10:7; "Joseph" in 10:6).

⁵ Gary N. Knoppers, "Israel's First King and 'the Kingdom of YHWH in the hands of the sons of David': The Place of the Saulide Monarchy in the Chronicler's Historiography," in C.S. Ehrlich and M.C. White, eds., *Saul in Story and Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2006) 207.

⁶ Jonker, "Of Jebus, Jerusalem and Benjamin," 9.

Conflict in the Eastern Diaspora

As discussed briefly in chapter two (§II.C), Esther and Daniel—irrespective of the historical accuracy of the events described—reflect different perspectives on assimilation to Babylonian and Persian society. Daniel’s perspective is more separationist and subversive, whereas MT Esther permits Jews a greater degree of accommodation to the foreign culture and government. It is perhaps noteworthy that the character Daniel and his three friends are from the tribe of Judah (Dan 1:6), whereas Esther and Mordecai are Benjaminites (Esth 2:5).

Summary

These minor examples demonstrate that struggles over community identity are embedded in certain texts of Persian-era Judah. As cultural, religious and ethnic minorities, Judah and Benjamin were concerned for the survival of their communities within the empire. Different views concerning the ethnic, religious and cultural relationship between these two tribes found their way into the canonical texts of the HB. A majority of these texts reflect an ideology that values reunification of the tribes but also centralization of the religious cult and regional government in Jerusalem.

The next sections will further nuance the relationship between conflicting groups during the return efforts. Gottwald, as shown below, frames the conflict as a class struggle between the returning *golah* elites and the *she’erit* working classes. The penitential prayers appeal to the shared Israel traditions of Judah and Benjamin in admissions of corporate guilt and appeals for restoration. The tension between the tribes lurks in the background of Deutero-Isaiah and the penitential prayers and informs the ways in which these texts appropriate the imagery of Lamentations.

III. INTERTEXTUALITY WITH DEUTERO-ISAIAH

Deutero-Isaiah (Deutero-Isaiah) is undoubtedly the post-587 BCE text with the closest relationship to Lamentations. Its author, addressing the *golah* community in Babylon in the 540s BCE,⁷ uses a plethora of Hebrew traditions and texts, including Lamentations, to encourage and strengthen his audience’s faith in YHWH’s past promises and imminent salvation through the Persian conquest of Babylon.

⁷ Gottwald, “Social Class and Ideology,” 44.

Ideology

Gottwald, self-consciously applying a Marxist rubric, considers Deutero-Isaiah to reflect the concerns of the *golah* former elites of Judah, with relatively little concern for the *she'erit* working classes.⁸ In his view, Deutero-Isaiah provides encouragement, reminding the *golah* community that they are the rightful elites of Judah, and justifying their claim to leadership with “the notion that the exile had ‘purified’ and uniquely qualified the deportees to lead a reconstituted Judahite *polis*.”⁹ By contrast, the *she'erit* are merely “a ‘faceless’ chorus welcoming the returnees.”¹⁰ Gottwald suggests that Trito-Isaiah’s critique of the returning *golah* leadership reveals a naiveté in Deutero-Isaiah’s idealistic return:

... We may perhaps conjecture that the “innocence” of Isaiah 40-55 about the Judahites in Judah was the reflexive “blind spot” of an aristocratic ex-official who simply assumed that his confreres, having “learned their lesson” in exile, would be a noble and just body of leaders who would behave differently than had their forefathers who governed in Jerusalem.¹¹

Lamentations, Gottwald argues, contains a *she'erit* critique of the returning *golah* leadership:

We read there of their disillusion with the Davidic dynasty and with the corrupt leadership of officials, priests and prophets.... It is hardly likely that these folk would gladly receive back the descendants of that discredited leadership “sight unseen” merely because they asserted a claim and had Persian authorization to back them.¹²

Gottwald’s assessment of Deutero-Isaiah, though offering some creative observations, unfortunately glosses over several important aspects of these two texts, creating an unwarranted distance between the positions reflected by Deutero-Isaiah and Lamentations. It is certainly true that there were competing claims to political and religious leadership during the return/restoration efforts. However, a simplistic claim that Lamentations reflects *she'erit* suspicion of *golah* leadership and that Deutero-Isaiah exhibits concern only for pro-Persian, exile-purified elites does not do justice to the complex concerns of these two texts. Chapter four (§IV) of this study has demonstrated that Lamentations, though written primarily from a *she'erit* perspective, exhibits concern for the *golah* and refugee communities as well. Chapter

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 52.

¹⁰ Ibid., 51.

¹¹ Ibid., 52.

¹² Ibid., 53.

two showed Deutero-Isaiah's concern for the desolate state of the *she'erit* as more than simply a "faceless chorus" welcoming back their aristocracy.

The unnecessary wedge Gottwald drives between Lamentations and Deutero-Isaiah taints some of his conclusions regarding the rhetoric and imagery of the two texts. He argues that "the imaginative figures of Jacob/Israel, Lady Zion and the Oppressed Servant of Isaiah 40-55 are supremely, even exclusively, those Judahites who were detained in Babylon."¹³ Yet Lamentations uses Lady Zion to protest on behalf of *she'erit* concerns (as well as *golah* concerns), and the Oppressed Servant bears some resemblance to the *geber* figure of Lamentations 3. Furthermore, Gottwald argues that Deutero-Isaiah's replacement of a Davidic figure with Cyrus was a way justifying *golah* leadership of Judah:

The author of Isaiah 40-55 takes a step [sic] farther [than the DtrH] in discountenancing any Davidic rule, conferring instead a "Davidic" legitimacy on Persian overlordship and on supervision of Yahwism as the established religion of the empire by a cadre of purified exiles. In one stroke, the Davidic covenant, with its close intermesh of politics and religion, is preserved in principle—but without David's dynastic successors having a part to play.¹⁴

This assertion allows Gottwald to dismiss the "Davidic democratization" tendencies of Deutero-Isaiah, particularly surrounding 55:3-4.¹⁵ He also questions the "liberative platform" often seen in Deutero-Isaiah.¹⁶

Newsom addresses one of these difficulties in a response to Gottwald.¹⁷ She argues that the *she'erit* community is *dialogically* present in Deutero-Isaiah through the appropriation of the rhetoric of Lamentations:

I don't agree...that there is in Second Isaiah either a naïve or a complacently "hard ball" assumption that the exiles will be welcomed back home. Rather, the use of the Judahite [*she'erit*] speech of Lamentations is an oblique acknowledgement that there are some social and ideological problems attached to going home again. What Second Isaiah does is to set out

¹³ Ibid., 53.

¹⁴ Ibid., 54.

¹⁵ Jill Middlemas, *The Templeless Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 110; Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 26-27.

¹⁶ "The exuberant universalist rhetoric has seemed to imply large humanizing goals" (Gottwald, "Social Class and Ideology," 55).

¹⁷ Carol Newsom, "Response to Norman Gottwald, 'Social Class and Ideology in Isaiah 40-55: An Eagletonian Reading,'" *Semeia* 59 (1992): 73-78.

to find an imaginative framework within which these social and ideological problems can be finessed. Strategically, for the exilic community to locate itself within the speech of the Judahite community provides the exilic community with a symbolic narrative within which they can imagine themselves being welcomed home....The use of Lamentations thus betrays a need (perhaps not consciously registered) for a common language, a common set of symbols with which the two communities can regard and make sense of one another.¹⁸

Newsom admits that this “common language” is certainly “populated with the intentions and interests of the exilic community.”¹⁹ But rather than shouting down or ignoring the *she'erit* community, in Deutero-Isaiah the *golah* community engages the other in dialogue through the use of Lamentations.

Gottwald dismisses an “inclusive” reading of Deutero-Isaiah and considers the invocation of the Davidic covenant in Isaiah 55:3-4 to be a *golah* co-opting of the Davidic role to bolster claims to nobility and hegemony in Judah. But his reading does not do justice to Isaiah 55 on his own terms. In verses 1-2 and 12-13, Isaiah 55’s utopia is a world without scarcity, labor or trade—one in which staples and luxury foods are available free to anyone, and the land easily yields its produce. Deutero-Isaiah does not appear to be concerned with reestablishing *golah* control of the means of production, but rather with a restoration scenario in which means of production are not a concern at all.²⁰

Deutero-Isaiah does appear to “democratize” the Davidic covenant, inasmuch as it applies the principle of royal representation—the king as the mediator between god and people—to the current situation in which Judah lacks a king. 55:3 extends the Davidic covenant offer to anyone who “listens” and “inclines the ear” to the prophet’s message, particularly those who are poor and thirsty (55:1-2). This universalizing vision considers YHWH to be the God of all nations and includes the conversion of Gentiles who will worship YHWH (42:6; 49:6; 55:5).

Intertextuality With Lamentations

Willey has provided a comprehensive discussion of the intertextual echoes within Deutero-Isaiah. Her assessment of intertextuality in Deutero-Isaiah is epitomized in the tension between the two exhortations, “Remember not the former things, and do not consider

¹⁸ Ibid., 75-76.

¹⁹ Ibid., 76.

²⁰ Anyway, it does seem that at least some *golah* ideologies hoped for a restoration of the monarchy, for which Zerubbabel was likely considered a candidate (cf. Hag 2:21-23; Zech 3:8-4:10).

the things from of old” (Isa 43:18), and, “Remember the former things from of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God and there is none like me” (Isa 46:9). Deutero-Isaiah simultaneously appeals to Judah’s most ancient traditions—particularly the exodus from Egypt—and “relativizes” those traditions in service to the present exilic situation.²¹ In this way the text both connects its audience to the past and subordinates that past to the present. Willey notes that this is an explicit part of Deutero-Isaiah’s agenda: “The paradoxical instructions both to remember and to forget the past openly declare Second Isaiah’s revisionary relationship to tradition and text.”²²

Willey notes that the connection between Lamentations and Deutero-Isaiah has long been recognized by Jewish tradition: Isaiah 40 is read on the Sabbath of Comfort, the first Sabbath following the Ninth of Av.²³ Building upon the work of Fishbane²⁴ and Hays,²⁵ Willey explores the phenomenon of “inner-biblical exegesis,” the process by which Jewish and Christian interpreters used and applied past revelation in new conditions. Following Hays’ first test of an echo—availability²⁶—Willey affirms the scholarly consensus that places Deutero-Isaiah late in the period of Babylonian hegemony (c. 550-538 BCE) and Lamentations closer to the destruction of the temple, “within a few decades” of 587 BCE.²⁷

The following sub-sections seek to establish the dependence of Deutero-Isaiah on Lamentations according to Hays’ other criteria, relying heavily upon Willey’s work, and emphasizing the second, third and fourth criteria: volume, recurrence and thematic coherence.²⁸ Of particular interest is the connection between Lamentations’ representative figures—Daughter Zion and the *geber*—and Deutero-Isaiah’s use of Daughter Zion and YHWH’s servant.

²¹ Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 72.

²² *Ibid.*, 74.

²³ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁴ Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

²⁵ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁷ Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 86.

²⁸ Hays, *Echoes*, 30.

Daughter Zion and Daughter Babylon: Feminine Imagery

The use of the female figure as a representative mother of a city has been well-established in this study's survey of literature on ANE city laments, the Hebrew prophets and Lamentations. Deutero-Isaiah takes up this important imagery and uses it to craft a future for Judah, reversing its tragic past. Deutero-Isaiah actually contrasts two female figures: Daughter Zion, who has been punished and oppressed, and Daughter Babylon, who will soon suffer the punishment she and her children meted out upon Zion and Zion's children.

Mintz notes the connection between the question found in Lamentations, "Who can console (נחם) you?" (Lam 1:2, 9, 16, 17, 21; 2:13; cf. Isa 51:19) and Deutero-Isaiah's insistence that God is the consoler (מנחם) of Israel (Isa 40:1, 49:13, 51:3, 12; 52:9; 54:11).²⁹ Willey contends, "Whenever Zion's lament of comfortlessness is answered in Second Isaiah, the assurance is accompanied by other reversals of language and imagery of Lamentations, creating a density of reference that can hardly be considered coincidental."³⁰

Isaiah 47 describes Daughter Babylon's humiliation in terms strikingly similar to those used in Lamentations to describe Daughter Zion's situation.

³¹ Lamentations	Isaiah 47
2:10 The elders of daughter Zion sit on the ground in silence; they have thrown dust on their heads and put on sackcloth ; the young girls of Jerusalem have bowed their heads to the ground .	47:1 Come down and sit in the dust, virgin daughter Babylon! Sit on the ground without a throne, daughter Chaldea! For you shall no more be called tender and delicate.
1:8b All who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness.	47:5 Sit in silence, and go into darkness, daughter Chaldea! For you shall no more be called the mistress of kingdoms.
1:7c ...When her people fell into the hand of the foe.	47:2 Take the millstones and grind meal, remove your veil, strip off your robe, uncover your legs, pass through the rivers. 47:3 Your nakedness shall be uncovered, and your shame shall be seen. I will take vengeance, and I will spare no one. 47:6 I was angry with my people, I profaned my heritage; I gave them into your hand ,

²⁹ Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 45.

³⁰ Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 132.

³¹ Citations in this section are from the New Revised Standard Version.

2:7b He has delivered into the **hand** of the enemy the walls of her palaces.

4:16 The LORD himself has scattered them, he will regard them no more; no honor was shown to the priests, no favor to the **elders**.

5:5 With a **yoke** on our necks we are hard driven; we are weary, we are given no rest.

5:8 Slaves rule over us; there is no one to deliver us from their **hand**.

1:9a Her uncleanness was in her skirts; she took no thought of her future (אֶתְרִית).

1:1 How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations! She that was a princess among the provinces has become a vassal.

Lam 2:14 Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes, but have seen oracles for you that are false and misleading.

you showed them no mercy; on the **aged** you made your **yoke** exceedingly heavy.

47:7 You said, "I shall be mistress forever," so that you did not lay these things to heart or remember their end (אֶתְרִית).

47:8 Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures, who sit securely, who say in your heart, "I am, and there is no one besides me; I shall not sit as a widow or know the loss of children"--

47:9 both these things shall come upon you in a moment, in one day: the loss of children and widowhood shall come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and the great power of your enchantments.

47:10 You felt secure in your wickedness; you said, "No one sees me." Your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray, and you said in your heart, "I am, and there is no one besides me."

47:13 You are wearied with your many consultations; let those who study the heavens stand up and save you, those who gaze at the stars, and at each new moon predict what shall befall you.

Linafelt suggests that Isaiah 49:13-26 is a direct answer to Lamentations.³² The sheer volume and strength of allusions to Lamentations confirm this:

Lamentations

Isaiah 49

³² Tod Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 72-78.

1:2b Among all her lovers she has no one to comfort (נחם) her.	49:13b For the LORD has comforted (נחם) his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones.
5:20 Why have you forgotten (שכח) us completely? Why have you forsaken (עזב) us these many days?	49:14 But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken (עזב) me, my Lord has forgotten (שכח) me."
2:20b Should women eat their offspring, the children they have borne?	49:15 Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.
1:1ab How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations!	49:21 Then you will say in your heart, "Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away-- so who has reared these? I was left all alone-- where then have these come from?"
3:25 The LORD is good to those who wait (קוה) for him, to the soul that seeks him.	49:23b Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who wait (קוה) for me shall not be put to shame.
3:58 You have taken up my cause (ריב), O Lord, you have redeemed (גאל) my life.	49:25b For I will contend (ריב) with those who contend (ריב) with you, and I will save your children.
4:10 The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; they became their food in the destruction of my people.	49:26b Then all flesh shall know that I am the LORD your Savior, and your Redeemer (גאל), the Mighty One of Jacob.
	49:26a I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine.

This nearly explicit dialogue with Lamentations is concerned with the reversal of the fragmentation of Judah, reintegrating the exiles (49:5, 9, 12, 18, 22), the *she'erit* (49:6, 8, 19-20), and the refugees (49:5, 9, 12, 18, 22).

Chapter four briefly highlighted Lamentations' response to the prophets' accusation of adultery against Zion.³³ If, as was asserted in that discussion, the question of the paternity of Zion's children undermines Lamentations' protest against YHWH, Deutero-Isaiah comforts and reassures Zion that YHWH will again be a husband to her and a father to her children (especially 54:1-8; also 50:1-3; 52:1-6).

³³ Cf. §IV.A.b.

Willey suggests that Isaiah 51-52 is the section of Deutero-Isaiah connected most closely to Lamentations:

Daughter Zion is depicted as an abandoned, suffering woman being called to awaken and arise to her restoration. Less thoroughgoing but still quite discernable echoes are found throughout chapters 49-54, especially wherever Daughter Zion appears, but also in relation to the servant. Whereas YHWH's voice was conspicuously absent throughout Lamentations, it is heard in Second Isaiah as an answer to Daughter Zion's complaints, reversing her sufferings and transferring them to her enemies.³⁴

Willey discusses the precarious theological and rhetorical balancing act in Isaiah 51:17-23:

Linkages between the lament and Isa 51:17-23 are not so copious as to remind audiences of the whole of that poetry's brutality, but they are repetitive enough to suggest to hearers that Second Isaiah is aware of, and sympathetic with, its concerns. At the same time, Second Isaiah's message presses to move on from the lament, to blaze a trail by which those who knew the worst of Jerusalem's sorrows could move from alienation and despair to hopeful envisionment. This is a delicate operation: to dwell on the lament too much might raise indignant and even insurmountable objections concerning YHWH's violent excesses. On the other hand, to minimize the destruction and its effects would risk never engaging with those most moved by the events of recent history."³⁵

Like Lamentations 4 in particular, Isaiah 51:17-23 is concerned with the fate of Zion's children because of her sin and neglect. Her children "lie [dead] at the head of every street" (51:20; Lam 4:1), having perished by the sword (51:19; Lam 4:9) and fainted from hunger (51:20; Lam 2:11-12, 19; 4:9). She has drunk the cup of wrath, but that cup will now be passed to her enemies (51:17, 21-23; Lam 4:21).

The image of Zion rising from the dust in Isaiah 52:1-2 contrasts with that of her humiliation in Lamentations 1-2 and that of the *geber* in Lamentations 3. The nations which have abused Zion by entering her "sanctuary" will no longer trouble her:

³⁴ Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 89.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 159-60; quotation from Irving Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity after the Holocaust," in Eva Fleischner, ed., *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* (New York: Ktav, 1977), 23.

1:8b All who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness .	52:1a Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion! Put on your beautiful garments , O Jerusalem, the holy (שְׁקֵדָה) city.
1:9a Her uncleanness was in her skirts ; she took no thought of her future;	
1:10 Enemies have stretched out their hands over all her precious things; she has even seen the nations invade (בוֹא) her sanctuary (מִקְדָּשׁ), those whom you forbade to enter (בוֹא) your congregation.	52:1b For the uncircumcised and the unclean shall enter (בוֹא) you no more.
2:10 The elders of daughter Zion sit on the ground in silence; they have thrown dust on their heads and put on sackcloth; the young girls of Jerusalem have bowed their heads to the ground .	52:2a Shake yourself from the dust , rise up, O captive Jerusalem.
3:28-29 [It is good] to sit alone in silence when the Lord has imposed it, to put one's mouth to the dust (there may yet be hope),	
1:14 My transgressions were bound into a yoke; by his hand they were fastened together; they weigh on my neck , sapping my strength; the Lord handed me over to those whom I cannot withstand.	52:2b Loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter Zion!

The imagery of rape is reversed: the nations formerly entered her “sanctuary” (Lam 1:10), but she no longer experiences such violation. Zion’s sins created a yoke on her neck (Lam 1:14); she now looses the bonds about her neck. Though Zion was a desolate woman, she is now to be clothed in beautiful garments, suggesting the position of a virginal bride or an honored wife. She is empowered to act as part of her own redemption by such imperatives as “awake yourself,” “clothe yourself,” “shake yourself,” “loosen your bonds.” Willey remarks, “Such a structuring emphasizes the reciprocal role that Zion plays in her own redemption—the one calling YHWH to arise must also be prepared to act.”³⁶

In Isaiah 52:11 the prophet reverses the uncleanness of Judah in Lamentations 4:15 and applies it now to the oppressing nation, Babylon.

4:15 “Away (סוּרִי)! Unclean (טִמְאָה)!” people shouted at them; “Away (סוּרִי)! Away (סוּרִי)!”	52:11 Depart (סוּרִי), depart (סוּרִי), go out from there! Touch no unclean thing (טִמְאָה); go
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³⁶ Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 170

Do not touch!” So they became fugitives and wanderers; it was said among the nations, “They shall stay here no longer.” out from the midst of it, purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the LORD.

Willey notes, “It is not now the Babylonian exiles who are unclean and untouchable, but rather the gentile city in which they are dwelling.”³⁷

Isaiah 52:7-8 signals the return of YHWH to Zion and the reunion of the Judahites: the *golah* community returns with YHWH, and the *she'erit* celebrate that return. This is contrasted with the absence of anticipated salvation in Lamentations 4:17: “Our eyes failed, ever watching vainly for help; we were watching eagerly for a nation that could not save.”³⁸ Willey emphasizes the unifying function of the rhetoric of Isaiah 51-52:

The exiles’ return to Jerusalem is posited as the appropriate response to a variety of previously known voices: not only the cries of Daughter Zion and the hopes of Jeremiah, but the supplications of lament psalmists and the narrations of Judah’s traditional identity. The reuse of these languages, along with some alterations and blending, positions Second Isaiah in relation to various previous formulations of Jerusalem’s destruction, *suggesting commonalities among the divergent voices and emphasizing their resolution*.³⁹

Isaiah 54 is the final portion of feminine imagery in Deutero-Isaiah. Willey connects this chapter most closely to Lamentations 5.⁴⁰

Lamentations 5:19-22 accuses YHWH of forgetting (שכח) and abandoning (עזב) his people. Isaiah 54:6-9 admits, in contrast with 49:15-16, that YHWH did abandon Zion, but only “for a moment”—now she will receive compassion and restoration. Willey observes that מאס and קצף (“despise” and “be angry”) appear together only twice in the HB: in Lamentations 5:22 and in Isaiah 54:6-8. As in the Sumerian city laments, divine wrath is connected to a flood which swept quickly and indiscriminately through the city (Isa 54:9); Deutero-Isaiah invokes the “never-again” aspect of the flood imagery in promising Zion that she will be permanently healed and restored.⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid., 127.

³⁸ Ibid., 128.

³⁹ Ibid., 172 (emphasis added).

⁴⁰ Ibid., 233-41.

⁴¹ Gen 9:11; see also Daniel Fleming, “Ur: After the Gods Abandoned Us,” *The Classical World* 97 (2003): 15.

Lamentations 5:1-3 draws attention to the desolate condition of Zion's children vis-à-vis the inherited land. Judah's people suffer disgrace (הָפְרָה) and loss of inheritance (הִלְקָה), because they are orphans and widows. This condition is reversed in Isaiah 54, in which Zion's disgrace (הָפְרָה) is forgotten (54:4) and inheritance restored (54:3, 17). Zion will no longer be a widow (54:4, 6) and her many children will no longer be orphans (54:1, 3, 13). Willey believes Deutero-Isaiah is "reluctant to mention the city's actual population" and adapts the image of Judah's many widows metaphorically into the image of Zion personified, but this assertion glosses over Deutero-Isaiah's subsuming the desolate *she'erit* of Judah under the one image of Zion.⁴² Deutero-Isaiah appropriates the *she'erit* imagery of Lamentations 5 in a *golah* context in order to map the reunion of Zion's separated children.

Isaiah 54:11-13 contains echoes of Lamentations 4. In Lamentations 4:1-2, Zion's children are called "sacred stones" which are now scattered and broken in the streets of Jerusalem like pottery. In Isaiah 54:11-13, these stones are once again treated as precious and are laid properly and luxuriantly all throughout the peaceful city. Willey further elaborates the linguistic and conceptual connections between these two passages and the notion of children as representing wealth and adornment.⁴³

The Servant and the Geber: Masculine Imagery

Willey explores the connections between Lamentations 3 and two major "servant" passages in Deutero-Isaiah: "Just as Second Isaiah seems to have reemployed Daughter Zion from Lamentations 1-2, likewise the poet seems to have recollected the figure of Lamentations 3, casting him in the role of YHWH's servant."⁴⁴ She argues that Isaiah 50:4-11 and 52:13-53:12 echo the lament of the *geber* in Lamentations 3.

Lamentations 3 and Isaiah 50:4-11 both take a submissive, instructive approach to suffering. Deutero-Isaiah explains, "I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting" (50:6). The *geber* instructs, "Let him give his cheek to the smiter; let him be filled with insults" (Lam 3:30). The hope is that YHWH will rescue and bless the one who is teachable. Willey notes the concern in both passages for "ears" and "listening" (Lam 3:56, 61; Isa 50:4-5, 10); in

⁴² Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 236.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 239-40.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 218.

Lamentations the plea is that YHWH would hear, whereas Deutero-Isaiah's claim is that YHWH has opened his ears to learn and to instruct.⁴⁵

The *geber* confesses on behalf of his people, “We have rebelled (וַיִּמְרֹנוּ)” (Lam 3:42), and in so doing is no longer rebellious. The servant is similarly submissive: “I have not rebelled (לֹא מְרִיתִי)” (Isa 50:5). Both the *geber* and the servant praise YHWH for his daily divine presence: “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning (חֲדָשִׁים לְבִקְרִים)” (Lam 3:22-23a); “Morning by morning (בַּבֶּקֶר בַּבֶּקֶר) he wakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught” (Isa 50:4b).⁴⁶

The *geber* and the servant request justice from YHWH against an adversary (Lam 3:57-59; Isa 50:8). Each describes his afflicted state as one in which he “walks in darkness without light” (Lam 3:2; Isa 50:10).⁴⁷

The connections between Lamentations 3 and the “Oppressed Servant” song in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 are similarly striking:

As the *geber* in Lamentations 3 had prescribed (Lam 3:28), [the servant] does not speak. Rather, others speak for him. He is rejected by others (Isa 53:3; see Lam 3:46, 53, 60-63); stricken (נָכַח, Isa 53:4; see Lam 3:30); afflicted and crushed (עָנָה, דָּכָא, Isa 53:4-5; see Lam 3:33-34—this combination is very rare); he suffers the perversion of justice (מִשְׁפָּט, Isa 53:8, see Lam 3:35); he is cut off (גָּזַר, Isa 53:8, see Lam 3:54 and also Jer 11:19) and buried (Isa 53:9, see Lam 3:53, 55. The *geber* had imagined being thrown alive into a well, but in Second Isaiah it is a grave.). He places himself in solidarity with sinners even while interceding for them (Lam 3:8, 40-42; Isa 53:11-12). The outcome that the *geber* only hoped for is enacted in Second Isaiah. The *geber* had suggested that there may yet be hope, that God would not allow injustice to continue unchecked (Lam 3:29, 34-39), but the speakers in Second Isaiah describe the servant's coming vindication in posterity, length of life, satisfaction, and prosperity (Isa 53:10-12). If YHWH was sufficient as the *geber*'s portion (חֵלֶק as a noun, Lam 3:24), now he is given a portion (חָלַק as a verb, Isa 53:12) of the spoil.⁴⁸

Willey suggests that the juxtaposition of the male figure in Lamentations 3 with Daughter Zion in Lamentations 1-2 would explain the apparent disjunction of “the male figure's interruption of Jerusalem-oriented passages” in Deutero-Isaiah. “If [this section of Deutero-Isaiah] is seen as a series of condensed, exegetical comments on a text already

⁴⁵ Ibid., 217.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 217.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 217-18.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 219-20.

known, its brevity and abruptness make more sense.”⁴⁹ The alternating treatment of the two figures “suggests continuities that are not explicated”⁵⁰ but are nevertheless present and intentional.

The figure of the “servant” in Deutero-Isaiah, identified with Jacob/Israel, represents the people collectively in much the same way that the *geber* represents his people in Lamentations 3. The sufferings of these representative male figures are portrayed partly as punishment for sin and partly as vicarious, penitential suffering on behalf of the people.⁵¹ Willey notes, “Unlike Zion, who expresses her theology by calling YHWH to account, the *geber* expresses his by attempting, midway through the lament, to reason his way to hope.”⁵² The punishment, contrition, instruction and repentance of these figures is one means by which the entire community, *golah* and *she’erit*, is restored to YHWH’s favor.

Other Echoes

In a few other instances, Deutero-Isaiah appropriates the language of Lamentations in ways that do not quite fit the specific feminine or masculine collective imagery of Daughter Zion or the *geber*. A few examples serve to demonstrate even further that Deutero-Isaiah appears to consciously echo and build upon Lamentations.

Isaiah 40:27 appears to echo Lamentations as well as some lament psalms: “Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God’?”⁵³ The protest repeated in every chapter of Lamentations is that YHWH has refused to “see” or “behold” Judah’s situation, or else presumably he would act on its behalf (1:7, 9, 11, 20; 2:20; 3:49-50; 4:16; 5:1).

One important aspect of Judah’s disgraced condition is noted in Lamentations 5:4-6 and then reversed in Isaiah 55:1-2. Though the destitute *she’erit* had to purchase food and drink from foreigners, in Deutero-Isaiah’s restored Judah staples and rich food will be available in abundance for free. If the author of Deutero-Isaiah is self-consciously part of an

⁴⁹ Ibid., 220-21.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 231.

⁵¹ Cf. John Walton, “The Imagery of the Substitute King Ritual in Isaiah’s Fourth Servant Song,” *JBL* 122 (2004): 734-43. Walton suggests that the Assyrian substitute king ritual provides a point of reference for the interpretation of Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Walton’s comparison provides further warrant for reading the Oppressed Servant figure as royal representative of the people as a whole.

⁵² Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 215.

⁵³ Ibid., 46

Isaiah tradition, his focus on this aspect of Lamentations' description of the *she'erit* plight is in line with that tradition: in Lamentations 5:6, Judah is forced to rely on Egypt and Assyria for aid—alliances specifically forbidden in Proto-Isaiah (Isa 7-8; 31; 36:6).

Summary

Based on Hays' tests of intertextuality, Willey has demonstrated convincingly that Deutero-Isaiah intentionally interacts with and appropriates the language of Lamentations (among other texts). Hays' second and third criteria, volume and recurrence, are demonstrated by the sheer number and closeness of affinities between the two texts. Hays' fifth criterion, historical plausibility, is demonstrable insofar as the first criterion, availability is established (see discussion above). The historical-interpretive criterion is met, for example, in the Jewish tradition of reading Lamentations and Deutero-Isaiah on consecutive weeks.

Willey's study has demonstrated that Deutero-Isaiah's appropriation of Lamentations contributes to Deutero-Isaiah's thematic coherence, particularly in illuminating the use of the representative figures, Daughter Zion and the *geber/servant*. She argues:

Whether Second Isaiah is...responding to specific texts identifiable by us, specific texts no longer identifiable by us, or *only general tenors of discourse exemplified by texts we know*, what is clear is that Second Isaiah continues to speak as response—not creating new media of discourse, but reshaping the discourse with which forebears and contemporaries have already been expressing their concerns.⁵⁴

Some of Willey's individual judgments concerning echoes of other HB texts within Deutero-Isaiah are open to debate. But for the purposes of the present study, her establishment of the relationship between Lamentations and Deutero-Isaiah, as well as her interpretation of that connection, appears to be sound.

Three important conclusions for this study may be drawn. First, Deutero-Isaiah clearly responds to Lamentations directly, offering its own response and mapping a reversal of Lamentations' tragedy. The two texts should be viewed as being more in dialogue, rather than in contradiction.

Second, Lamentations' community-cohesion concerns are echoed and addressed in Deutero-Isaiah. Lamentations' representative figures are appropriated to express the restoration ideal, which focuses on Judah's reconstitution as a free people blessed by YHWH.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 142-43 (emphasis added).

Third, Deutero-Isaiah's adaptation of the *geber* figure into the servant figure presages and anticipates to a certain degree the humble, teachable ideal of the penitential prayer genre. The next section will focus on that genre and attempt to establish its connection to Lamentations 3, with particular attention to the hope that prayer and repentance will result in the reconstitution of Judah/Israel as a people.

IV. INTERTEXTUALITY IN PENITENTIAL PRAYERS

Introduction

The genre of penitential prayer was an important element of second-temple Jewish piety. This genre may be defined so as to include Ezra 9, Nehemiah 1, Nehemiah 9, Daniel 9, Prayer of Azariah, and Prayer of Manasseh. For the purposes of this study, the last three will be excluded since they likely emerge from Hellenistic contexts rather than the Persian era.⁵⁵ Isaiah 63-64, often considered a communal lament,⁵⁶ and the prayer of Solomon in 2 Chronicles 6 will be considered alongside the penitential prayers because of their similarities to that genre and likely origins in the Persian era.⁵⁷

A "Mediating Form": Lamentations 3

It would certainly be of value to look for common verbiage within Lamentations and the penitential prayers; there is certainly no shortage of words and phrases echoed in these later texts. But another important issue is whether the conceptual and theological structure of penitential prayers, is dependent to any degree on Lamentations.

In Lamentations 3, there may be discerned three conceptual and theological bases for the *geber*'s attempt to mobilize YHWH on his behalf (see chapter three for discussion on the

⁵⁵ Amy-Jill Levine, "Prayer of Azariah," in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible (NOAB)*, Michael D. Coogan, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 189 AP; *ibid.*, "Daniel," *NOAB*, 1271-73 HB; John S. Kselman, "Prayer of Manasseh," *NOAB*, 301 AP.

⁵⁶ Bautch, *Developments in Genre*, 83. Elsewhere, Bautch considers further the tension in this poem between lament and confession of sin; see "Lament Regained in Trito-Isaiah's Penitential Prayer," in Mark Boda, Daniel Falk and Rodney Werline, eds., *Seeking the Favor of God, Volume 1: The Origins of Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism* (Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 83-99.

⁵⁷ The dating of Chronicles is disputed; Gary N. Knoppers ("1-2 Chronicles," *NOAB*) suggests, "A date in the fourth century seems most plausible, because it would account both for the author's references to other biblical writings and for literary features within the work that anticipate similar features in Jewish Hellenistic writings" (576-77 HB).

purpose of laments). The first stance is one of *ethical protest*: the *geber*, like Daughter Zion in Lamentations 1-2, draws attention to all the violence YHWH has committed against him (3:1-20). He makes no explicit statement regarding the justice of YHWH's actions, but the protest is implicit. This material, like much of Lamentations, is characterized by vivid description of distress.⁵⁸

A second stance is one of *covenant appeal* to YHWH's character: his covenant faithfulness (707), compassion and righteousness (3:21-24, 31-36). This stance acknowledges implicitly that Judah has been unfaithful, and trusts in YHWH's mercy to restore his people. There is no sense that YHWH has been unjust in punishment.

Interwoven with the appeal is a stance of passive, *penitential acceptance* of suffering (3:25-30, 37-40). This stance considers YHWH's punishment to be a form of chastening, a provisional circumstance which will be altered when Judah's sin is purged through suffering.⁵⁹

With these three bases established, the *geber* then addresses YHWH directly in his mobilization attempt. All three stances may be discerned in 3:41-66. The poet protests against YHWH's lack of pity (3:43), the injustice of the attack on Judah (3:52) and YHWH's failure thus far to act on Judah's behalf (3:49-50, 59). The poet acknowledges his people's unfaithfulness (3:42) but appeals to YHWH's compassion and covenant justice in their defense (3:55-59, 64-66). Rather than seeking his own vengeance, the poet accepts the punishment from YHWH's hand and trusts that Judah's enemies will be repaid in time (3:64).

Lamentations 3 appears to reflect a more developed⁶⁰ theological perspective than the rest of Lamentations, particularly Lamentations 1, 2 and 4. The focus shifts from a litany of complaints against YHWH's punishment to a sober, teachable, penitential stance.

Lamentations 5, classified as a communal lament, continues the rhetoric of 3:41-66, by bringing to YHWH's attention Judah's desolation (5:1-6, 8-14, 18), acknowledging sin (5:7, 15-17), and appealing to YHWH's covenant faithfulness (5:19-22).

⁵⁸ Boda, "The Priceless Gain of Penitence," 89.

⁵⁹ This analysis is similar to that of Boda, "The Priceless Gain of Penitence," 93-94.

⁶⁰ The use of the term "developed" does not imply the superiority of Lamentations 3 as an authentic expression of grief or as "orthodox" theology; rather, Lamentations 3 provides reflections on suffering that are more nuanced and more distant from the tragedy than Lamentations 1-2 and 4.

Theologies of Penitential Prayers

The penitential prayers are likewise designed to mobilize YHWH on behalf of his people. The focus of these prayers, however, is shifted even further toward sober acceptance of suffering and covenant appeal. In these prayers, as in Lamentations 3, major concerns are the fragmentation of the people, universal suffering, the disruption of social and religious institutions, and the ongoing state of oppression. In some instances the prayer is recited by the people together, and in other instances a righteous representative figure takes upon himself the responsibility of seeking YHWH's forgiveness on his people's behalf.

Penitential prayers are intended to "bring an end to the devastating effects of the fall of the state: either to captivity, oppression, or the sorry condition of Palestine,"⁶¹ and are characterized by:

- Expression of distress;
- Emotional depth;
- Request for divine modification in disposition;
- Appeal to promise;
- Theological "credo": the greatness and graciousness of YHWH;
- Law used negatively as basis for punishment;
- Law used positively as path for covenant renewal and therefore community restoration.

Boda asserts that the tradition can be traced as early as the Persian period; he finds allusions to Nehemiah 9 in the speeches of the prose inclusio of Zechariah 1-8.⁶²

As mentioned briefly in chapter four, penitential prayers contain elements of later, more portable Yahwistic traditions that permitted Jews to maintain their beliefs and practices apart from the physical temple in Jerusalem. Yet the primary goal of restoration in the land of Palestine remained within these prayers long after the second temple was built, because of the ongoing state of oppression under a series of colonial powers (Neh 9:32, 36-37; Ezra 9:8-9).

Echoes of Lamentations in Penitential Prayers

⁶¹ Boda, "The Priceless Gain of Penitence," 83.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 85.

Individual Representative For the Nation

The first half of the present chapter, as well as the previous chapter, discussed at length the literary and rhetorical uses of Daughter Zion and the *geber* in Lamentations as representative figures.

Isaiah 63:7-64:12, like other communal laments, is spoken by an individual on behalf of his community. The passage begins with a statement of YHWH's grace in a singular first-person voice (63:7), and its last half is a first-person plural appeal (63:16-64:12).

Ezra, a leader of the *golah* community in Judah, prays on behalf of the community (Ezra 9:3-6), implicating himself in their sin (9:6-7, 13-15). In Nehemiah 1, Nehemiah prays privately (1:4), confessing on behalf of "the people of Israel," and implicating himself and his father's family (1:6).

In Nehemiah 9, the elites of Judah—first, a group of Levites named in verse 5—confess corporate guilt before YHWH. The statement is then sealed and confirmed by the leadership listed in 10:1-27—princes, Levites and priests—and by the whole congregation, including women and children, "all who have wisdom and understanding" (10:28). In this passage the representative function of the elites is acknowledged and embraced by the people as a whole.

2 Chronicles 6 is a didactic historical portrayal: Solomon's prayer of dedication is his "teaching" on repentance and forgiveness for individual and corporate guilt, which the Chronicler applies in a postexilic context. The prayer emphasizes the importance of personal confession and repentance, as well as corporate confession (6:21, 24-31, 34-39). Though Solomon in his prayer is not acting as a penitential representative of the people, the building of the temple is an act on behalf of the entire community that allows them to make confession for sin. He follows his father David (6:10, 14-17), who is for the Chronicler the example *par excellence* of penitence (1 Chr 21).

Physical Posture of Lament/Grief

Lamentations repeatedly pictures a representative figure, either Daughter Zion or the *geber*, in a humble physical posture of grief or lament: sitting on/bowing to the ground in silence (1:12; 2:10, 15; 3:6, 28-29), raised hands (1:17; 2:19), loud weeping or crying out (2:11, 18-19; 3:8, 48-50), and groaning (1:21-22).

Ezra, upon hearing of the intermarriages of the *golah* community with the peoples of the lands, places himself in a physical state of humiliation, mourning and penitence. He tears his clothes as well as his hair and beard, and sits "appalled" (מְשׁוּמֵם) in silent fasting for a

period of time (Ezra 9:3-4). Then he kneels, raises his hands to heaven, and hides his face during his prayer on behalf of the community (9:5-6).

Nehemiah's penitential prayer is preceded by a period of several days spent sitting, mourning, fasting and praying silently (Neh 1:4). During the communal prayer in Nehemiah 9, the entire community dresses in sackcloth and ashes (9:1).

Though Solomon's prayer is not technically a prayer of confession within the narrative context of Chronicles, Solomon adopts a penitential physical posture during the prayer, kneeling before the altar and "spreading out his hands before heaven" (2 Chr 6:12-13).

It is worth noting that these physical postures of humility are common cultural expressions of grief and not unique to Lamentations or the city laments.⁶³ Nevertheless, the similarities between Lamentations and the penitential prayers are worth considering cumulatively rather than individually.

Prologue of Praise

Four of the five prayers under consideration begin with statements of praise to YHWH:⁶⁴

Isa 63:7 I will recount the gracious deeds (חסד) of the LORD, the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, because of all that the LORD has done for us, and the great favor (טוב) to the house of Israel that he has shown them according to his mercy (רחמים), according to the abundance of his steadfast love (חסד).

Neh 1:5 I said, "O LORD God of heaven (שמים), the great and awesome God who keeps covenant (שמר ברית) and steadfast love (חסד) with those who love him and keep his commandments..."

Neh 9:6 And Ezra said: "You are the LORD, you alone; you have made heaven (שמים), the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth (ארץ) and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. To all of them you give life, and the host of heaven worships you."

2 Chr 6:14 He said, "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven (שמים) or on earth (ארץ), keeping covenant (שמר ברית) in steadfast love (חסד) with your servants who walk before you with all their heart..."

These prologues emphasize YHWH's greatness in creation and in keeping his covenant. Like Deutero-Isaiah, the penitential prayers reverse the language of destruction, suffering and

⁶³ See also the discussion in ch. 3, §II.C.

⁶⁴ Ezra 9:6-15, recognized as something of a mixed-genre composition, contains no such prologue (Bautch, *Developments in Genre*, 83).

rejection found in Lamentations. Instead of creating and sustaining his particular land, temple and people, YHWH unleashes destruction from the heavens (Lam 2:1). Rather than comfort and compassion, YHWH's people experience pain and forsakenness (5:20). Lamentations 3, like the penitential prayers, affirms YHWH's covenant faithfulness (חסד) and his compassion (3:22, 32), but without any apparent evidence of those traits in the moment of suffering.

Recount of Covenant History; Appeal to YHWH's Covenant Faithfulness

Penitential prayers cite Israel's covenant history with YHWH as part of the admission of corporate guilt. In this regard they share features of the בר (covenant lawsuit) genre, except that the accused in the penitential prayers recount their own covenant unfaithfulness. The historical references in the penitential prayers are applied to the present situation—personal and corporate guilt and suffering—in such a way as to demonstrate timeless truths concerning sin, suffering, repentance and forgiveness.

Lamentations has few historical references, but alludes to YHWH's covenantal history with Israel. There are numerous admissions of covenant guilt (1:18a; 3:42; 5:7, 16) for which punishment was promised long ago (1:5b, 10c, 21c; 2:8a, 17ab). Mention is made of Israel's previous state of covenant blessing (1:7b; 4:1) and protection (2:3b; 4:12) from YHWH's hand. The Davidic promise appears to have been annulled (4:20). The legendary punishment of Sodom has come upon Jerusalem (4:6). 3:21-24 and 5:19-22 appeal to YHWH's history of covenant faithfulness and compassion.

Key redemptive-historical moments mentioned within the penitential prayers include:

- The election of the Patriarchs (Neh 9:7-8);
- The exodus from Egypt (Isa 63:8-9, 11-13; Neh 1:10; 9:9-11; 2 Chr 6:5);
- The giving of the Law and wilderness wanderings (Isa 63:10; Ezra 9:10; Neh 1:7-9; 9:12-21);
- The conquest narratives (Isa 63:14; Ezra 9:11-12; Neh 1:8-9; 9:22-25);
- The Judges-cycle (Neh 9:26-29);
- The building of the Jerusalem temple (Isa 64:1-3; Neh 1:9; 2 Chr 6:6-21);
- The exile (Isa 63:18-19; Ezra 9:7, 13; Neh 1:8; 9:30-37; 2 Chr 6:36-40).

The penitential prayers and Lamentations both appeal to Israel's history to explain the suffering of the exile. Lamentations focuses more on the starkness of suffering,⁶⁵ but is still able to put that suffering within some redemptive-historical perspective. The penitential prayers, like Deutero-Isaiah, draw from that same stream of tradition to map a restoration hope.

Statement of YHWH's Rightness and Admission of Corporate Guilt

Lamentations, as has been previously noted, places more emphasis on YHWH's responsibility for Judah's suffering than on the justness of his actions. The stance of protest is present to some degree in each chapter. Yet also present are numerous admissions of corporate guilt and statements of YHWH's rightness (1:18a; 3:42; 5:7, 16).

By contrast, corporate guilt and YHWH's rightness are key features of the penitential prayers (Isa 63:7, 10; 64:5-7; Ezra 9:15; Neh 1:5-7; 9:33). These statements attempt to mobilize YHWH to act in the nation's favor by admission of guilt and appeal to covenant, rather than by accusing YHWH of excess and vengeance.

Appeal to YHWH's Reputation

YHWH's own reputation before the nations of the world is an important factor in some biblical appeals for mercy (e.g., Num 14:13-19; Ps 79:9-10; 115:1-2; Ezek 20:9, 14, 22).

As discussed in chapter four, Lamentations has a dialogic relationship to certain books of the Latter Prophets such as Hosea. Lamentations' protests against YHWH's cruelty to his "wife" and her children are made in a public forum; YHWH is on trial before the nations, accused of being a negligent and abusive deity.

In their more contrite and resigned moments, the poets of Lamentations appeal to YHWH's reputation as a compassionate deity who has bound himself to his people in a covenant (3:22, 32, 55-66; 5:1-2, 19-22). The penitential prayers make this second sort of appeal to YHWH's reputation in the world (Isa 63:7, 17-18; 64:8-12; Ezra 9:9; Neh 1:9, 11; 9:17-19; 2 Chr 6:32-33).

Description of Present Suffering

Lamentations and the penitential prayers are designed to draw attention to suffering, in the hope of spurring YHWH to action on behalf of his people. These descriptions frequently

⁶⁵ Boda, "The Priceless Gain of Penitence," 89.

include the appeal—either to YHWH or to an outside observer—to “look upon” or “hear” about the tragedies that have befallen the sufferer(s). These appeals commonly use the verbs ראה, נבט, שמע and זכר, often in the imperative or jussive.

Lam 1:11c-12 “Look (ראה), O LORD, and see (נבט), for I am despised. Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look (נבט) and see (ראה) if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the LORD inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.”

Lam 3:56 You heard (שמע) my plea; do not close your ear (אזן) to my cry for help!

Lam 5:1 Remember (זכר), O LORD, what has befallen us; look (נבט), and see (ראה) our disgrace!

Isa 63:15 Look (נבט) down from heaven and see (ראה), from your holy and beautiful habitation.

Isa 64:9 Be not so terribly angry, O LORD, and remember (זכר) not iniquity forever. Behold, please look (נבט), we are all your people.

Neh 1:6 Let your ear (אזן) be attentive and your eyes open, to hear (שמע) the prayer of your servant...

Neh 1:11 O Lord, let your ear (אזן) be attentive to the prayer of your servant...

Neh 9:9 And you saw (ראה) the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard (שמע) their cry at the Red Sea.

2 Chr 6:19-21 Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O LORD my God, listening (שמע) to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you, that your eyes may be open day and night toward this house, the place where you have promised to set your name, that you may listen (שמע) to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. And listen (שמע) to the pleas of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen (שמע) from heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear (שמע), forgive.

2 Chr 6:40 Now, O my God, let your eyes be open and your ears (אזנות) attentive to the prayer of this place.

The nature of the suffering varies, but prominent concerns include: the ongoing state of poverty and lack of means of production; suffering under foreign hegemony; scattering of the people in various lands; and desolation of the sanctuary. Lamentations and the prayers presume YHWH’s sovereign ability to ameliorate these sufferings if he chose to do so.

Other Echoes

Although the prayer of Isaiah 63-64 begins in 63:7, the first six verses of Isaiah 63 contain an oracle of judgment against Edom not unlike the proclamation found in Lamentations 4:21-22. Both use imagery of Edom drinking to excess from the cup of YHWH’s wrath (Isa 63:6; Lam 4:21).

Ezra 9:11 and Lamentations 1:8 and 1:17 contain four of the only five occurrences of הִטְּמָה (“menstrual uncleanness”) outside the Pentateuch and Latter Prophets:

Lam 1:8 Jerusalem sinned grievously, so she has become a mockery (הִטְּמָה); all who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness; she herself groans, and turns her face away.

Lam 1:17 Zion stretches out her hands, but there is no one to comfort her; the LORD has commanded against Jacob that his neighbors should become his foes; Jerusalem has become a filthy thing (הִטְּמָה) among them.

Ezra 9:11 ...Which you commanded by your servants the prophets, saying, “The land that you are entering to possess is a land unclean (הִטְּמָה) with the pollutions (הִטְּמָה) of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations. They have filled it from end to end with their uncleanness.”

Lamentations 1 appears to connect Zion’s ritual uncleanness with her voluntary act of whoredom or with the consequent sexual slavery: Zion’s idolatry has resulted in her despised, desolate state. Ezra 9:11 recalls the idolatry of Canaan’s previous inhabitants, who contaminated Israel with their impurities.

Community Concerns

As in the poems of Lamentations, community reunification and cohesion is a concern of the penitential prayers. The prayers express a sense of communal guilt for the sins that led to the exile, the indiscriminate suffering of the entire people in Judah and abroad, and the fragmentation of the tribes of Israel. As in the communal laments examined in chapter three, return to the land and restoration of social and religious institutions is a high priority.

Isaiah 63:10 admits the collective guilt of Israel. Even in this postexilic context, the inhabitants of Yehud consider themselves to be part of “the house of Israel” (63:7) and among the “tribes of heritage” (63:17). In what may be an allusion to the marriage/family metaphor over which Lamentations disputes with the prophets (see chapter four), this orphaned community renounces descent from Abraham and Jacob and claims YHWH as its father (63:16). The community pleads again for his paternal favor: “We are all your people” (64:9). All stand equally in his displeasure (64:6-7). Many people have been restored to the land, but YHWH has not returned to the land and his temple, leaving these desolate (64:1, 10-11).

Ezra 9 affirms universal communal guilt for the exile (9:15), which has resulted in a continuing state of slavery (9:7-8). The favor granted by YHWH through the Persian kings has included the restoration of the temple and the return to Judah, but the people are still not completely secure (9:9).

Nehemiah 1 admits the guilt of the community for the exile (1:6). The major concern of this short prayer is the dispersion of Israel (1:6) “among the peoples” (1:8), as well as the promise that Israel would be regathered if they repented (1:9).

Nehemiah 9-10, as discussed previously, involves a community ceremony in which the leaders act on behalf of the people, who then confirm together the confession of the leadership. All members of the society have suffered under the yoke of oppression since the Assyrian exile (9:32). Now, all are complicit in the sin of intermarriage, and all suffer the continuing state of slavery in the land together (9:36).

2 Chronicles 6 teaches confession and repentance for all different kinds of national affliction: military defeat, drought, famine, pestilence, plague, siege, etc. (6:24, 26, 28).

Summary

Boda aptly summarizes the relationship between previous scriptural tradition and the goals of the composer of the great penitential prayer of Nehemiah 9:

The composer of Neh 9 is sensitive to the needs of his generation and recites their traditions with a view to engendering hope for his own people while extracting grace from his God. Here we see the crucial role that tradition played in the life of the people not to merely inform them didactically but to bring hope, elicit repentance, and voice their needs to their God in a time of disaster. It shows the great resource of inscripturated traditions for the present needs of successive generations and the openness to on-going interpretation of these fixed traditions.⁶⁶

The penitential prayers under present consideration are similar in this regard. Like Deutero-Isaiah preceding them and many of the later authors of second temple Judaism—including New Testament authors like Paul—the composers of penitential prayers redeploy ancient traditions in the service of their own faith communities.

Lamentations is part of that tradition, representing the starkest, darkest, loudest and fullest expression of the defining tragedy of exilic and postexilic Judaism. This section has sought to illumine some of Lamentations’ themes and motifs echoed in penitential prayers of the Persian era.

There is no doubt—returning to Hays’ criteria for evaluating possible echoes—that these penitential prayers are not as indebted to the poetry of Lamentations as Deutero-Isaiah appears to be. Most echoes that can be discerned are more indirect and conceptual than those found in Deutero-Isaiah. Nevertheless, the penitential prayers appear to stand in the tradition

⁶⁶ Boda, *Praying the Tradition*, 196.

of the communal laments, of which the poems of Lamentations are a peculiar part. It also seems clear enough that the penitential prayers share Lamentations' concern for the fragmentation of the people of YHWH. Boda concludes:

Neh 9 is a prayer which arose within the early restoration community in the Persian province of Yehud....It reveals the composite nature of a community struggling for its existence on the frontiers of the Persian empire, confirming the presence of *divergent groups forced together through adversity*.⁶⁷

V. CONCLUSION

Building on the work of Willey, Boda and Batach, this chapter has demonstrated a connection between Lamentations and later Yahwistic expressions of suffering and hope. A strong intertextual connection exists between Lamentations and Deutero-Isaiah; the connection between Lamentations and the penitential prayers is more conceptual and generic. All of the texts considered in this chapter lament the fragmentation of Israel and hope for its reunification and prosperity. The tension between the fragmented tribes of Israel appears to be an implicit or explicit concern of quite a few Persian-era texts.

In constructing a future for their people, Deutero-Isaiah and the penitential prayers appeal to the founding myths of Israel: the exodus, wilderness and conquest narratives. In an exilic context, Deutero-Isaiah envisions a new exodus that would reverse the Babylonian captivity. In the postexilic Persian Diaspora and Yehud, the authors of penitential prayers—disappointed by the underwhelming restoration despite the fall of Babylon—look to traditions of repentance and prayer in order to invite YHWH to regather all Israel, to sanctify his people and his temple once again, and to rescue them from foreign oppression.

These traditions appeal to Lamentations in different ways. Deutero-Isaiah uses Lamentations as a dramatic expression of the extreme depth of Zion's suffering, in order to accentuate the loftiness of imminent salvation. The penitential prayers draw from Lamentations' quiet, humble sufferer a model for enduring punishment and inducing the renewal of YHWH's favor. This diversity of appropriation suggests Lamentations' portability and flexibility, even in this early period of its promulgation and (possible) liturgical use.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 197 (emphasis added).

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND IDEAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This chapter summarizes the findings of this study, evaluates the thesis postulated in the introduction, and suggests avenues for further study.

I. SUMMARY OF ARGUMENTATION

This study essentially “triangulates” from three different premises, toward a theory concerning rhetorical functions of Lamentations during the Persian period. One postulated rhetorical function is the contribution to community cohesion in the restoration hopes and efforts.

Chapter two demonstrates initially that the people of Judah were fragmented by the events of 587 BCE, and that these communities came into conflict in the Persian era. Since Judah’s fragmentation was an important aspect of the tragic event, hopes and plans of restoration would involve the regathering and reconstitution of Judah (in theory, all Israel) as a unified, free people.

Chapters three and four seek to establish three premises from which to work toward an understanding of Lamentations’ rhetorical function in light of Judah’s fragmentation.

First, chapter three shows that a significant function of both the communal laments of the Hebrew Bible and the city laments of Sumer was community cohesion in the aftermath of a tragedy. Suffering created a solidarity that bound disparate, desperate people together.

Next, chapter four argued that the book of Lamentations, through form and content, communicates distress over the fragmentation of Judah. Furthermore, the poetry of Lamentations has an atemporal, ahistorical quality that allows it to be appropriated in contexts beyond that of its composition.

Lamentations’ trans- or a-historical character is evidenced by its enduring significance in Jewish and Christian tradition. This third “triangulating” premise of this study is supported

by studies in Rabbinic interpretation of Lamentations (TgLam, Lamentations Rabbah, etc.),¹ as well as by modern literary studies.²

From these three premises, chapter five demonstrates that Lamentations plays a rhetorical role in the exilic and postexilic restoration programs. The example *par excellence* of Lamentations' rhetorical ability is the apparent response to Daughter Zion and the *geber* found in Deutero-Isaiah.³ The penitential prayers of the Persian period also evidence similar concerns to those found in Lamentations, while utilizing similar imagery and verbiage.⁴ These examples at least give us some indication of Lamentations' influence on Jewish identity, culture and liturgy in this era.

Of course, Lamentations' influence in the Persian era is difficult to prove conclusively; no incontrovertible archaeological or textual proof has been discovered to this effect. But it seems reasonable to assign early importance to this book. Most scholars consider Lamentations to be a *she'erit* text,⁵ but its influence appears to have reached the east quite early on, as evidenced by its intertextual relationship to Deutero-Isaiah, which is likely a *golah* text.⁶ There never seems to be a question in Jewish tradition concerning the book's canonicity,⁷ and it was discovered at Qumran with other canonical texts of the HB. It is difficult to know definitively when (and by whom) that canonicity was recognized—just as it is difficult to date the very notion of a closed canon.

¹ Alan Mintz, "The Rhetoric of Lamentations and the Representation of Catastrophe," *Prooftexts 2* (1982): 1-17; Shaye J.D. Cohen, "The Destruction from Scripture to Midrash," *Prooftexts 2* (1982): 17-39.

² Cohen, "The Destruction from Scripture to Midrash," 19; Paul M. Joyce, "Sitting Loose to History: Reading the Book of Lamentations Without Primary Reference to Its Original Historical Setting," 246-62 in *In Search of True Wisdom: Essays in Old Testament Interpretation in Honour of Ronald E. Clements*, E. Ball, ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

³ Patricia Tull Willey, *Remember the Former Things: The Recollection of Previous Texts in Second Isaiah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

⁴ Mark J. Boda, "The Priceless Gain of Penitence: From Communal Lament to Penitential Prayer in the 'Exilic' Liturgy of Israel," 81-101 in N. C. Lee and C. Mandolfo, eds., *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts* (Atlanta: SBL, 2008); Richard Bauckham, *Developments in Genre Between Post-Exilic Penitential Prayers and the Psalms of Communal Lament* (Atlanta: SBL, 2003).

⁵ Jill Middlemas, *The Templeless Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 97.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 96-97.

⁷ Johan Renkema, *Lamentations*, Brian Doyle, trans. (Historical Commentary on the Old Testament; Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 34.

II. CONTRIBUTIONS

As an interdisciplinary project that has incorporated elements of historical study, literary and rhetorical criticism, and biblical interpretation, this study contributes to the understanding of Jewish history in the Persian period and the book of Lamentations as scripture. By attempting to situate Lamentations in an ancient context that was formative for Judaism, this study attempts to explain from an historian's perspective how Lamentations came to be part of the Hebrew canon. The tools of literary and rhetorical criticism are employed to explain the functions of laments generally and Lamentations in particular in various cultural contexts. Those functions are then integrated with an historical understanding of Jewish identity in the Persian period to postulate one possible function of Lamentations in this period: the reunification of the disparate people of Israel.

Historical

This study contributes to the understanding of the formation of Jewish identity. Jewish identity since the destruction of the first temple has been shaped by minority status in nearly every cultural context, and by the evolution of a portable, textual religion. This study concludes that the preservation of the book of Lamentations was both a reflection of and a contribution to these two aspects of Jewish identity.

The apparent relationship between Lamentations—a *she'erit* text—and the penitential prayers—likely a *golah* genre—may indicate that there is not as significant a gap between the *she'erit* and *golah* ideologies as has been previously thought, particularly as pertains to the question of guilt for the exile. Rather, there appear to have been members of both *she'erit* and *golah* communities that sought solace and restoration in Israel's ancestral traditions, as well as members of both communities who cared less for traditional, "orthodox" explanations for Israel's oppression.

It is also an oversimplification to characterize the conflict during the return as a Marxian struggle between the *golah* elites and *she'erit* working classes, as Gottwald suggests.⁸ The nemeses of the returning *golah* leaders are invariably the existing elites of Yehud. The returning *golah* perspective, which became the dominant perspective within the HB, favored a penitential reformation of Judah's leadership (Neh 8-10) that would restore

⁸ Norman K. Gottwald, "Social Class and Ideology in Isaiah 40-55: An Eagletonian Reading," *Semeia* 59 (1992): 43-57.

YHWH's blessing to the whole people. Attributing the best of motives to the *she'erit* elites who opposed the returnees, their goals appear to have been prosperity and prominence through the existing imperial structures. This sort of conflict was recurrent in second temple Judaism, most notably in the Maccabean crisis and the tension between the Sadducees and Pharisees.

Lamentations, by treating all the people of Judah equally before YHWH, and by inciting YHWH to action on Judah's behalf, fits within an ideology that favors traditional, orthodox worship of YHWH, and reunification of the tribes under YHWH's chosen king. Its composition and canonization therefore becomes an important datum in historical reconstructions of Jewish thought and culture.

Literary and Rhetorical

This study highlights the cohesive function of communal laments, particularly city laments, and attributes this generic function to the book of Lamentations. Lamentations is a work of survival literature,⁹ composed with the goal of keeping a fractured tragedy-stricken community together. Lamentations also appears to be among the first of the canonical works composed for a templeless people and thus exhibits a rhetorical concern for portability.

Part of chapter four explores the relationship between the acrostic artifice and the meaning of the poem, starting with the very general premise that the alphabetic acrostic form connotes completeness/wholeness. From that premise, the text of Lamentations is examined with a particular attention paid to the apparent deviations from the rigid structure. This interpretive method produces fresh insights into the meaning and intent of the poet(s)—insights that turn out to be of peculiar value to the historical thesis concerning the situation of oppressed and fragmented Judah.

This project is deeply indebted to previous studies of the phenomenon of intertextuality in scripture.¹⁰ The thesis is supported particularly by the connection between Lamentations and Deutero-Isaiah. To the extent that this study succeeds in demonstrating the similar concerns and goals of these two texts, the intertextual ties between these two texts appear to be strengthened.

⁹ Tod Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Especially Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Willey, *Remember the Former Things*; Baultch, *Developments in Genre*; Boda, "The Priceless Gain of Penitence."

Theological

Lamentations is a theological interpretation of history. It is designed “justly to allot memory” in the community of faith. “Justice” in the mind of the author(s) includes both admission of Israel’s guilt but also the contention that YHWH might have gone too far in punishing Israel. By focusing on the horrific past and present events perpetrated by YHWH in response to Daughter Zion’s unfaithfulness, Lamentations puts the burden back upon YHWH to respond favorably to his people once again.

The “just allotment of memory” in Lamentations is consistent with a Deuteronomistic theology of retribution. Lamentations itself alludes to texts such as Deuteronomy 28, which describe in detail the curses that will come upon Israel for disobedience. By in some measure vindicating YHWH in his judgment for sin (Lam 1:7, 10, 18, 21; 2:8, 17; 5:21), Lamentations is then able to hold YHWH to his promises to restore Israel after the exile (Deut 30:1-10).¹¹

The author(s) of Lamentations sought to shape the memory of the temple’s destruction in such a way as to inspire obedience to YHWH in the community, as well as compassion and mercy in YHWH himself. Since Israel perceived itself as remaining in a state of spiritual exile and political oppression, the book of Lamentations was canonized as a perennial, perpetual, timeless expression of sinful but oppressed Israel’s relationship to YHWH. The exilic-era hope of renewed covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel evolved into a penitential tradition that has influenced liturgy and personal piety in Judaism even up to the present.

III. AVENUES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Rhetoric of Lamentations

Chapter four contends that Lamentations is designed with portability in mind, and that portability comes to fruition for the Judahite communities in Persian-era cohesion. This is essentially an attempt to extrapolate backward into the Persian era the observations of various

¹¹ This interpretation does not depend upon the author(s) of Lamentations having access to the complete book of Deuteronomy in its current form. (In the view of the present author, the DtrH probably reached something close to its final form soon after 587 BCE.) Those who had a *Deuteronomistic* outlook on retribution and YHWH’s covenant promises—an outlook which could produce a rhetorical strategy such as that of Lamentations—were almost certainly present in both *golah* and *she’erit* communities.

scholars regarding Lamentations' timelessness or a-historic character.¹² It could be of value to pursue this line of thinking into the Hellenistic and Rabbinic periods.

It could be fruitful to compare the rhetorical strategies employed by the Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic versions of Lamentations, and the rhetorical functions of these translations in historical contexts. Do the LXX and TgLam preserve, modify, enhance, or detract from the a-historical nature or the Hebrew original, or its community-cohesion concerns?¹³ What, if anything, do the changes (through translation and interpretation) demonstrate concerning the evolving purposes and functions of the Lamentations tradition in various Jewish contexts?

The Servant and the *Geber*

Willey notes that the juxtaposition of the male figure in Lamentations 3 with Daughter Zion in Lamentations 1-2 illumines the interweaving of Daughter Zion and (male) servant passages in Deutero-Isaiah, which has sometimes been considered disjointed in this regard.¹⁴ The similarity between the literary figures of the *geber* in Lamentations 3 and the Servant in Deutero-Isaiah deserves further attention.

Acrostics and Hebrew Syntax

This study contributes to the understanding of the alphabetic acrostic artifice. Certainly the acrostics of Lamentations differ in significant ways from the other acrostics of the HB; the meaning of this form has yet to be fully explained. The acrostics may be an important key to understanding the role of word-order in Biblical Hebrew poetry.¹⁵

A more thorough examination of the discourse of Lamentations in light of the acrostic form—specifically, the instances of “crossover” and other sorts of rebellion against the rigid

¹² In particular: Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*; Joyce, “Sitting Loose to History”; Mintz, “The Rhetoric of Lamentations”; Boda, “The Priceless Gain of Penitence”; and Christian M.M. Brady, *The Rabbinic Targum of Lamentations: Vindicating God* (Boston: Brill, 2003).

¹³ An initial assessment is that the LXX appears to attempt preservation of the simple a-historical character of the MT, whereas TgLam more actively makes Lamentations timeless/trans-historical by interweaving moments of Jewish history without regard to original historical setting or chronology.

¹⁴ Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 220-21.

¹⁵ See, for example: Nicholas P. Lunn, *Word-Order Variation in Biblical Hebrew Poetry: Differentiating Pragmatics and Poetics* (Waynesboro, Ga.: Paternoster, 2006). The acrostic poems provide an interesting set of data in this regard: pragmatic and poetic concerns yield to the artifice. An integration of Lunn's thorough work on poetry and recent work on the acrostics has yet to be attempted.

artifice—may further contribute to the interpretation of Lamentations as well as other acrostic poems.

Reunification Themes in Exilic and Postexilic Literature

This study briefly surveys the fragmentation of Israel and the internecine conflict embedded within a several books of the Hebrew Bible. The exploration of these fragmentation and reunification themes may yield interpretive insights into the motivations of other poetic books of this era. Study of the Psalter, with its diversity of form and content, composite authorship, liturgical focus, and carefully-edited theological shape, would perhaps benefit most from the present examination of Lamentations in this regard.

Echoes of Lamentations in Zechariah

The book of Zechariah appears to contain linguistic and thematic connections to Lamentations:¹⁶

- In Zechariah 2:10 (MT 2:14), the adjuration that Daughter Zion “cry out” and “weep” (Lam 2:18-19) is transformed into an exhortation that she “cry out” and “rejoice.”¹⁷
- The relatively rare verb קרַךְ (“to pierce,” twelve occurrences in the HB) is found in Zechariah 12:10 and 13:3, and in Lamentations 4:9.¹⁸
- The noun מִטְּמָאָה (“filthy thing”/“menstrual impurity”), rarely used outside the Pentateuch, occurs in Zechariah 13:1 as well as in Lamentations 1:8 and 1:17.
- Zechariah 14:8 specifically predicts that in the grand restoration living waters will flow from Jerusalem to the eastern sea (Dead Sea). Mason notes that this is a reversal of the curse that came upon the Dead Sea for Sodom’s sake. This curse is alluded to in Lamentations 4:6.¹⁹ The reversal of the curse upon the land and sea of Sodom signals the consummation of YHWH’s restored kingdom; if Sodom’s curse could possibly be undone, so could Israel’s.

¹⁶ Mark J. Boda and Michael H. Floyd, eds., *Bringing Out the Treasure: Inner Biblical Allusion in Zechariah 9-14* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003).

¹⁷ Risto Nurmeela, “The Growth of the Book of Isaiah Illustrated by Allusions in Zechariah,” in *Bringing Out the Treasure*, 248.

¹⁸ Mason, “Zechariah 12:1-13:6,” in *Bringing Out the Treasure*, 162-63.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, “Zechariah 14,” in *Bringing Out the Treasure*, 185.

Zechariah also appears to have much in common with the penitential tradition, which is indebted to Lamentations. Connections between Zechariah, the penitential prayers and Lamentations could be worthy of further investigation.

Theodicy and a Theology of Protest

Chapter four of this study has argued that Lamentations' rhetoric of protest needs to be set within a theological framework that admits Israel's sin and partial responsibility for the exile.

Lamentations' particular spin on the problem of evil deserves comparison with those of the books of Job and Ecclesiastes, which are also poetic theodicies from this period. Each of these books strikes a balance between YHWH's sovereignty in permitting suffering and his compassion and covenant faithfulness. For example, just as (primarily Christian) interpreters have been too quick to jump to Lamentations 3 for a theological answer to the problem of suffering while ignoring Daughter Zion's protest in the first two chapters,²⁰ so also the substance of Job's protest (Job 3-37) needs to be considered before the "orthodox" perspective presented in YHWH's answer (Job 38-41). Lamentations provides the community of faith with one facet of a philosophically rich and complex answer to the problem of evil. Together with Lamentations, books like Job and Ecclesiastes form a deep tradition of meditation that defies simplistic answers.

²⁰ Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 2-18.

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