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'Whence This Evil?' A Critical Assessment of (Anti)Theodicy and Innocent Suffering in Lamentations 3

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AND INNOCENT SUFFERING IN LAMENTATIONS 3

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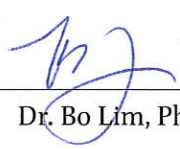A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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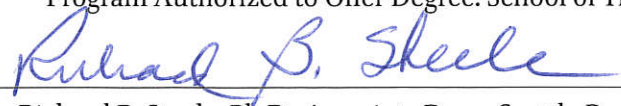Dr. Bo Lim, Ph.D., Thesis Advisor, School of Theology

Program Authorized to Offer Degree: School of Theology

Date: _____ 8/28/14 _____
Dr. Richard B. Steele, Ph.D., Associate Dean, Seattle Pacific Seminary

The lament is a dramatic, rhetorical, liturgical act of speech that is irreversible. When spoken, it is done and cannot be recalled. It makes clear that Israel will no longer be a submissive, subservient recipient of decrees from the throne. There is a bold movement from Israel's side – a voice that does not silently and docilely accept but means to have its dangerous say, even in the face of God. In risking this form of speech, the conventional distribution of power is called into question. It is no longer placidly assumed that God has all the power and the covenant partner must simply submit. Pain speaks against legitimacy, which now for the first time is questioned as perhaps illegitimate.

(Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 27)

The power of the status quo puts up the façades
into which our consciousness crashes.
It must seek to crash through them.
This alone would free the postulate of depth from ideology.
Surviving in such resistance is the speculative moment:
what will not have its law prescribed for it by given facts
transcends them even in the closest contact with the objects,
and in repudiating a sacrosanct transcendence.
Where the thought transcends the bonds it tied in resistance –
there is its freedom. Freedom follows the subject's urge to express itself.
The need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth.
For suffering is objectivity that weighs upon the subject;
its most subjective experience, its expression,
is objectively conveyed.

(Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 17-18)

Νοήσωμεν πῶς ἀόργητος ὑπάρχει πρὸς πᾶσαν τὴν κτίσιν αὐτοῦ.

(Clement of Rome, *I Clement* 19.3)

Κακίας πάντῃ πάντως ἀναίτιος ὁ Θεὸς.

(Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.2)

Βία οὐ πρόσεστι τῷ Θεῷ.

(*Epistle to Diognetus* 7.4)

וְהָיִיתָ מְשֻׁגָּע מִמַּרְאֵה עֵינֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּרְאֶה
וְאָכַלְתָּ טְנ‍ִדְפְרִי־בְ בְשַׂר בָּנֶיךָ וּבְנֹתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לְךָ יְהוָה
יָשִׂישׂ יְהוָה יְכַמֵעַל לְהַאֲבִיד אֶתְכֶם וּלְהַשְׁמִיד אֶתְכֶם
עַל־כֵּן אֵיכָה תֹאמְרוּ חֲכָמִים אֲנַחְנוּ וְתוֹרַת יְהוָה אִתָּנוּ
אָכֵן הִנֵּה לַשֶּׁקֶר עָשָׂה עֵט שֶׁקֶר סֹפְרִים

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CHAPTER 4: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS & CONCLUSION

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Anchor Bible Commentary
ABD	David Noel Freedman (ed.). *The Anchor Bible Dictionary.* New York: Doubleday, 1992.
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ad loc.	*ad locum*, at the same place
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANE	ancient Near East
ANET	James B. Pritchard (ed.). *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
ANF	*Ante-Nicene Fathers*
ArBib	The Aramaic Bible
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
AThR	*Anglican Theological Review*
AJ	Acta Jutlandica
b. Ber.	Babylonian Talmud (*Berakhot*)
b. Shabb.	Babylonian Talmud (*Shabbat*)
b. Qidd.	Babylonian Talmud (*Qiddushin*)
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
BHS	*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 5th edn.
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
Bib	*Biblica*
BibOr	Biblica et orientalia
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament
BSac	*Bibliotheca sacra*
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*

BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBR	*Currents in Biblical Research*
CEB	Common English Bible
CEV	Common English Version
cf.	*conferre*, compare
CGR	*Conrad Grebel Review*
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
cj.	conjectural reading
CMP	Culture Memory in the Present
COE	Currents of Encounter: Studies on the Contact Between Christianity and Other Religions, Beliefs, and Cultures
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series
COS	William W. Hallo (ed.). *The Context of Scripture*. 3 Vols. New York: Brill, 1997-2002.
CurBS	*Currents in Research: Biblical Studies*
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
EB	Echter Bibel
e.g.	*exempli gratia*, for example
EJ	*European Judaism*
ESV	English Standard Version
FAT	Forschungen zum alten Testament
FOTL	The Forms of the Old Testament Literature
GBHS	Bill Arnold and John Choi. *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax.*
GCS	Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte
GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, as Edited and Enlarged by E. Kautzsch, Revised by A. E. Cowley.* 2nd edn. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910.
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HALOT	L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner and J.J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Trans. and ed. M.E.J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994-1999.
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HBT	*Horizons in Biblical Theology*
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum alten Testament

HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
IB	George A. Buttrick (ed.), *The Interpreter's Bible* (12 vols.)
IBHS	B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax.* Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990.
IBS	*Irish Biblical Studies*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
idem/eadem	the same (author)
Int	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IntR	Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church
IRT	Issues in Religion and Theology
JAB	*Journal for the Aramaic Bible*
JANESCU	*Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBH	Judaica Books of the Hagiographa
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JLT	*Journal of Literature and Theology*
JNSL	*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JQR	Jewish Quarterly Review
JR	*Journal of Religion*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* Supplement Series
KAT	Kommentar zum alten Testament
KHC	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
Lam. Rab.	Lamentations Rabbah
LHB/OTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
MC	Mesopotamian Civilizations
MT	Masoretic Text
NAC	New American Commentary
NCBC	The New Century Bible Commentary

NCV	New Century Version
NET	New English Translation
NETS	New English Translation of the Septuagint
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NJPS	*Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text*
NLT	New Living Translation
NPNF	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
NZSTR	*Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
op. cit.	*opere citato*, in the work already cited
OT	Old Testament
OTE	*Old Testament Essays*
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTM	Oxford Theological Monographs
passim	here and there
PJT	*Pacific Journal of Theology*
ProEccl	*Pro ecclesia*
Proof	*Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History*
PRSt	*Perspectives in Religious Studies*
RB	*Revue Biblique*
RelS	*Religious Studies*
SAIS	Studies in Aramaic Interpretation of Scripture
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSCS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series

SECS	Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies
SemSt	Semeia Studies (SBL)
SHS	The Scripture and Hermeneutics Series
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
SOFS	Symbolae osloenses fasciculus suppletorius
SSN	Studia semitica neerlandica
STDJ	*Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah*
STL	Studia theologica Iudensia
StPatr	Studia Patristica
s.v.	*sub verbo*, under the word
SVTQ	*St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*
Tg. Lam.	Targum Lamentations
Tg. Neof.	*Targum Neofiti*
Tg. Ps.-J.	*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*
THOTC	Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary Series
txt em.	textual emendation
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
UF	*Ugarit Forschungen*
viz.	*videlicet*, namely
VCSup	Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum*
WA	Martin Luther. *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (*Schriften/Werke*). Weimar: H. Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1910. ["*Weimarer Ausgabe"*]
WBBC	Wiley-Blackwell Bible Commentary
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttetestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZB	Zürcher Bibel
ZTK	*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*
√	*radix*, root

Abstract

Recent scholarship on Lamentations has focused on the voice of Daughter Zion in chapters 1-2. Arguing that the frank protests constitute an antitheodicy, interpreters have placed these poems in opposition to the voice of the man in Lam 3, specifically 3:21-42. This Wisdom-like, paraenetic section is seen to put forth a theodicy, counseling penitent acceptance of God's righteous judgment. The present study argues instead that, when incorporated into the rhetorical movement of Lam 3 as a whole, 3:21-42 instead constitutes an antitheodicy consonant with Lam 1-2. It is proposed that Lamentations manipulates the expected theodic solution until it has been ironized as an ethically deficient foil, problematizing the facile justifications offered for Jerusalem's plight. This is accomplished through close exegesis of Lam 3 and utilizing Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of "dialogism" and "double voicing." Theological implications are offered in the final chapter.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Adept scholar, master of erudition,
you blaspheme in the anguish of your thoughts.
Divine purpose is as remote as innermost heaven;
it is too difficult to understand, people cannot understand it. [...]
Even if one tries to apprehend divine intention, people cannot understand it.

(FRIEND XXIV, *THE BABYLONIAN THEODICY*; *COS* 1:154)

Lamentations' testimony is bitter, raw, and largely unhealed.
Its poems use "wounded words" to illumine pain and resist God's acts in the world.

(KATHLEEN O'CONNOR)[1]

1. *Where Lamentations Finds Itself*

THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS HAS NEVER ENJOYED a prominent place in the religious thought of Judaism and Christianity, especially when compared to popular works such as Isaiah, the Psalms, or Job. This is not to say the book was ignored or its canonicity questioned (it never was). Among others, both the Targumim and Midrashim[2] offer rich interactions with the text, and in the Middle Ages notable

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[1] Kathleen O'Connor, *Lamentations & The Tears of the World* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 4.

[2] For Targum Lamentations (*Tg. Lam.*): *The Targum of Lamentations: Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes*, translated by Philip S. Alexander (ArBib 17b; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008); also see Christian M. M. Brady's recent translation in Robin A. Parry and Heath A. Thomas (eds.), *Great Is Thy*

commentaries were produced by R. Shlomo Yitzhaki (Rashi) and Abraham Ibn Ezra.[3] In the Christian tradition, writers in both the Patristic and Medieval periods sporadically interacted with short sections, usually single verses (Origen is a significant exception here), often reading the book as containing prophecy or allegory concerning Christ, but also instructions regarding lament and asceticism. Stretching back to at least the eighth-century Carolingian church is a liturgical tradition of reading selections from Lamentations during Holy Week (read during the night office of Tenebrae).[4] John Calvin's 1563 *Commentary on Lamentations* stands out as a thorough interaction with the entire book,[5] but his work is a rarity among pre-modern treatments.

Regardless of the mixed quality of studies throughout history, such writers served to keep Lamentations within the consciousness of the community, if still on the fringes. However, when compared to the interaction with other, more prominent texts of the Bible, one gets the sense that people have never really known quite what to do with it. Hand in hand with allegorical proof-texting, it is as if the book suffered a degree of *de facto* Marcionism. To this day, for example, Lamentations remains entirely absent from the liturgy of the Orthodox Church. Robin Parry and Heath Thomas aptly observe that, "were it left to us, it may well not have had a place at the table *at all*. Rather, like the desolate character of Lady Jerusalem sitting alone as people pass by on the other side of the road

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Faithfulness?: Reading Lamentations as Sacred Scripture (Eugene: Pickwick / Wipf & Stock, 2011), 228-247. For the Midrash on Lamentations (*Lam. Rab.*) – variously called Lamentations Rabbah, Lamentations Rabbatti, Aggadat Eikhah, Megillat Eikhah, Midrash Kinot/Qinot, Eikhah Rabbati, Eikhah Rabbah, etc. – see *Lamentations Rabbah: An Analytical Translation*, trans. Jacob Neusner (BJS, 193; Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1989). The designation "Rabbati" is apparently taken from Lam 1:1 ("How lonely sits the city that was once *full of people* [רבתי עם]") and is therefore not quite synonymous with the *Rabbah* by which the *Midrashim* of other books of the Bible are called (e.g., *Genesis Rabbah*, *Ruth Rabbah*, etc.).

[3] See R. Solomon ben Isaac מקראות גדולות (Warsaw 1860-69); *Five Megilloth: The Books of Lamentations, Ecclesiastes. A New English Translation of the Text, Rashi, and a Commentary Digest*, translated by Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg (JBH, 2; New York: Judaica, 1992). See R. B. Salters, *Lamentations* (ICC; London / New York: T. & T. Clark, 2010), 1-2 for further bibliographic information regarding medieval Jewish exegetes.

[4] On Maundy Thursday Lam 1:1-14 was read; on Good Friday Lam 2:8-10 and 3:1-9 was read; on Holy Saturday Lam 3:22-30, 4:1-6, and 5:1-11 was read. See Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. E. M. Macierowski (Vol. 2; Ressourcement: Retrieval & Renewal in Catholic Thought; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 41-52.

[5] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations*, translated and edited by John Owen (Vol. 5, Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, 2010).

(Lam 1), the book of Lamentations itself has been passed by, ignored by the other guests. [...] We often turn away from that text sitting alone in the corner weeping."[6] And yet its presence in the canon persists. Whatever the reason, this little book has survived – if not a little malnourished.

The present work aims to provide a fresh interpretation of Lamentations 3, particularly the Wisdom-like, paraenetic section of 3:22-42. I will begin with an overview of questions on authorship, date, and location, and then survey the recent research on Lamentations. Though current scholars have begun to explore the figure of Daughter Zion in Lam 1-2, historically the tendency has been to view the central portion of Lam 3 as the "heart" of the book, constituting the core of its theological message, interpreted as, "*hope in the midst of deserved suffering*."[7] The character at the center of chapter 3 (the גבר, "strongman") is frequently presented as the model sufferer for both his present community and future readers. After a brief indulgence in complaint (3:1-20), the גבר is said to come to his senses (3:21), and through most of the remainder of the chapter eloquently recites the proper posture of God's people in the midst of the present calamity: Yahweh is good; he is in control of all that occurs; though this suffering is harsh, we deserve it and must respond with repentance and prayer. A large portion of Lam 3, then, seems to provide a theodicy *par excellence*. A recent article by Kelly M. Wilson repeats the common view that, "by focusing myopically on Lamentations 3, the majority of interpreters have allowed its images of hope and conversion to eclipse the rest of the text and have effectively silenced those who are suffering."[8] Indeed, Tod Linafelt has critiqued traditional

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[6] Parry and Thomas, *Great Is Thy Faithfulness?*, p. xiii.

[7] See, e.g., Delbert Hillers, *Lamentations: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Rev. edn.; ABC; Garden City: Doubleday, 1992), 5-6, 119-123; Salters, *Lamentations*, 117; Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 33; and especially Norman Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations* (2nd edn.; SBT, 14; London: SCM, 1954), 91-111; Homer Heater, "Structure and Meaning in Lamentations," *BSac* 149 (1992): 304-315; Otto Plöger, *Die Klagelieder* (HAT; Tübingen: JCB Mohr, 1969), 128–129; Hans Jochen Boecker, *Klagelieder* (ZB; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1985), 15–17; Jože Krašovec, "The Source of Hope in Lamentations," *VT* 42 (1992): 221–233; Hans-Joachim Kraus (cited in Clause Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994], 35; German edn. 1990); Alan Mintz, "The Rhetoric of Lamentations and the Representation of Catastrophe," *Proof* 2 (1982): 1-17.

[8] Kelly M. Wilson, "Daughter Zion Speaks in Auschwitz: A Post-Holocaust Reading of Lamentations," *JSOT* 37.1 (2012): 93-108.

appropriations of Lamentations 3 for both their male and Christian biases, as well as emphasis on reconciliation rather than confrontation – and quite appropriately so in my view.[9] But I believe these typical readings to be mistaken and based on a fundamental misunderstanding of Lamentations 3. My argument is quite different: in brief, the paraenesis in chapter 3 contains the seeds of its own destruction and eventually collapses in on itself. Put another way, I will argue that the גבר takes on the role of theodicist, only to reduce his theodicy to moral and theological absurdity. Daughter Zion and the גבר are not opposed to one another after all. I will seek to turn the function of this section on its head and show that it operates as an *antitheodicy*[10] consonant with the protests of Daughter Zion.

A close treatment of 3:19-42 and 3:55-61 will serve to exhibit the rhetorical function of key sections within Lam 3. I will argue that a dose of "tragic irony" imbues Lam 3, and in this way my thesis is closely aligned to arguments put forth by F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp as to the tragic structure of Lamentations,[11] as well as arguments offered by Adele Berlin[12] and (to a lesser extent) Kathleen O'Connor.[13] To a point one may view this project as a nuanced expansion of these authors' works, but I do part ways at significant junctures and my argument concerning the rhetorical details of Lam 3 remains distinctive. As to the dose of irony, I will argue it lies in the גבר's marshaling of covenantal, Wisdom-like material – originally drawn upon for meaning and comfort, but converted into the subversion of that very tradition. Scholars have long noted the probable influence on Lamentations

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[9] Tod Linafelt, " Zion's Cause: The Presentation of Pain in the Book of Lamentations," in *idem* (ed.), *Strange Fire: Reading the Bible after the Holocaust* (The Biblical Seminar, 71; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 267-290 (quoting 268).

[10] Similar in some ways to what Brueggemann has termed Israel's "countertestimony" in *Theology of the Old Testament*, 317-403. For antitheodicy, here I am echoing Zachary Braiterman, (*God*) *After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp also picks up on Braiterman's language in *Lamentations* (Int; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

[11] F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology in the Book of Lamentations," *JSOT* 74 (1997): 29-60; also see *Lamentations*, 1-48.

[12] Adele Berlin, *Lamentations: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), esp. 95-98.

[13] Kathleen O'Connor, *Lamentations & The Tears of the World*, 49-57, 83-147; *eadem*, "Lamentations" in *New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001) 6:1011-1072.

from at least the Deuteronomistic,[14] prophetic,[15] Wisdom,[16] and Zion[17] traditions. Following Dobbs-Allsopp, I will posit that Lamentations manipulates the "ethical vision"[18] (Provan's "orthodox view of suffering"[19]) until it is has been ironized as an ethically deficient foil.[20] But, *pace* Dobbs-Allsopp, I will argue that the theodicy of Lam 3 in fact deconstructs itself so that its irony comes from without *and* within. It is not as though Dobbs-Allsopp is "wrong," but that he has not gone far enough.

I will approach my interpretation of the text as a critique of the presence of sacred violence, and my explicit agenda is one stemming from the ideological conviction of nonviolence. This frames my interdisciplinary approach as I partake in theological and literary methodologies. Theologically, I privilege a form of antitheodicy that actively critiques biblical theodicies as severely lacking in one way or another. I will also avail myself of the insights of literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. His theories on dialogism, polyphony, double voicing, and the phenomenon of "open texts" will prove instrumental in constructing the interpretative frame through which we may best understand Lam 3. I will also examine the category of innocent suffering as a theological reality. Here I will seek to bolster my argument that Lam 3 enters into a dialogical encounter with received theodicy, demonstrating that the Hebrew and early-Jewish theodic imagination contains signposts of a potent antitheodicy throughout its literary history. Finally, I will conclude with some brief comments on the potential trajectories of antitheodicy in biblical theology and how Lamentations 3 might contribute to such a dialogue.

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[14] Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, 51-52, 66-71; Bertil Albrektson, *Studies in the Text and Theology of the Book of Lamentations: With a Critical Edition of the Peshitta Text* (STL, 21; Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1963), 231-239.

[15] Albrektson, *Studies in the Text*, 231-237; Hillers, *Lamentations*, 21-22, 24, 87-88, 89, 105.

[16] Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, 71-72; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Klagelieder* (*Threni*) (3rd edn.; BKAT, 20; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968), 58; Artur Weiser, *Klagelieder* (ATD, 12.2; Göttingen, 1958), 75; Renate Brandscheidt, *Gotteszorn und Menschenleid* (Trier: Paulinus, 1983), 43.

[17] Albrektson, *Studies in the Text*, 219-230.

[18] Here Dobbs-Allsopp uses the terminology of Wendy Farley, who refers to Lamentations (along with Job, the story of Saul, and certain Psalms) as evincing "traces of a tragic sensibility in the Bible" (*Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990], 23).

[19] Iain Provan, *Lamentations* (NCBC, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 23.

[20] Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology," 47.

The major claim of this thesis is that Lamentations 3:22-42a in particular presents a gradual distancing of Yahweh's involvement in the גבר's plight. This section problematizes the assumption that Yahweh is in fact responsible for Jerusalem's suffering, culminating in the daring (and unnerving!) suggestion that the reason for the present horror is not to be sought at God's hands. The theodicy becomes tragically ironized through "passive double-voicing" (Bakhtin's term). This collapses into further complaint in 3:42b-66, where what was initially marshaled as a theodicy becomes tragically ironized until we may read all of Lamentations 3 not as silencing the voice of Daughter Zion, but joining her chorus of antitheodicy in the denunciation of sacred violence and upholding the reality of innocent suffering.

2. Contextual Concerns

a. Authorship, Date, and Place of Composition

Questions of authorship, date, and place of composition have been well rehearsed, and there is no point in diving into a detailed survey here. I will simply highlight issues that I see as pertinent to my overall argument. For more detailed treatments, see the helpful surveys by Claus Westermann and Paul House.[21]

The initial Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 597 BCE and the resulting destruction of the city in 587/586 BCE are remembered as pivotal shifts in the history of Israel/Judah. Until the so-called Edict of Cyrus in 539 BCE,[22] the period of the exile was one of traumatic tumult for Yahwistic religion. The destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem forced a moment of crisis upon the people of Judah. How could faith in Yahweh persist in the midst of such an audacious violation of God's city and

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[21] Westermann, *Lamentations*; Paul R. House, *Lamentations* (WBC, 23b; Nashville: Nelson, 2004).

[22] The veracity of the Edict of Cyrus is disputed. In all probability an order of some sort was sent by Cyrus to rebuild the temple, but there is a discrepancy between the two accounts in Ezra that depict the edict. See Ezra 1:1-4 and 6:3-5. Cf. Lisbeth S. Fried, "The Land Lay Desolate: Conquest and Restoration in the Ancient Near East," in Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 34-38.

people? It is generally agreed that the major literary traditions of the Hebrew Bible were redacted into their final form(s) during these years, but Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Deuteronomistic History, and Lamentations are believed to represent a literary and theological means of coping with the disaster – Israel's post-exile self-definition.[23]

Because of the likely proximity with the exilic period and similarity in certain aspects of theology, the earliest tradition regarded the prophet Jeremiah as the author of Lamentations. Most early interpreters assumed that the reference in 2 Chr 35:25 was sufficient evidence for Jeremian authorship.[24] LXX Lamentations opens with an explicit claim to Jeremiah's authorship, and the Peshitta, Targum, and Vulgate have similar headings. Indeed, the Septuagint's tradition of authorship led to its canonical location immediately after the book of Jeremiah – a location reflected in the Christian canon. On the other hand, the Hebrew Bible reflected in the Masoretic Text places Lamentations in a section of the Writings known as the *Megilloth* (festival scrolls), right after Psalms and Proverbs. The *Megilloth* are placed in the following order in Codex Leningradensis: Ruth, Song of Songs, Qoheleth, Lamentations, Esther. Of course, variations exist. Whatever the canonical placement, editors seem to have consciously linked Lamentations with the Babylonian exile. Hermann von der Haardt's 1712 commentary began a period of almost total rejection of Jeremian authorship.[25] Many now see several authors as responsible for the book, connected in some way with the royal court, prophetic circles, or temple singers at Mizpah or Bethel. While a rejection of Jeremiah as author is not as conclusive as often asserted, it is a reasonable conclusion. Some have argued that Lamentations was consciously written in a "Jeremiah-like style," and this is certainly possible.[26] In this work I share

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[23] Jill Middlemas, *The Templeless Age: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the "Exile"* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

[24] 2 Chr 35:25: "Jeremiah also uttered a lament for Josiah, and all the singing men and singing women have spoken of Josiah in their laments to this day. They made these a custom in Israel; they are recorded in The Laments [הקינות]."

[25] See Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 590-597. Interestingly, while still believing Jeremiah to be the author, Calvin rejects the then-common view that Lamentations corresponds to 2 Chr 35:25 (*Commentaries*, 299).

[26] So Nancy C. Lee, *The Singers of Lamentations: Cities Under Siege, From Ur to Jerusalem to Sarajevo* (BIS, 60; Leiden: Brill, 2002).

the widespread agnosticism regarding authorship. Even if some of the poems were in fact written by a single author, it is undoubtedly the case that a group of various editors are responsible for the form we now possess.

Lamentations 1, 2, 4, and 5 are generally agreed to belong in the exilic period,[27] but chapter 3 has often been offered as evidence of multiple authorship and/or post-exilic dating. It is argued that the entire chapter is composed later than the others, or (more commonly) that Lam 3:21-39 sits awkwardly in the poem due in part to later insertion/redaction. Middlemas argues that Lamentations 3 (esp. 3:21-39) reflects an exilic *Golah* perspective rather than that of the Judahites remaining in and around Jerusalem who offer complaint-oriented poems.[28] The unique paraenetic tone, penitential themes, and hopeful perspective stand in stark contrast to the rest of the book, and this certainly offers a plausible explanation as to why that is. According to Middlemas, Lam 3:21-39 should be understood as *correcting* the view of both 3:1-20 (and perhaps 3:40-66) and chapters 1-2. But her analysis fails to incorporate the rhetorical movement into chs. 4-5 and remains incomplete.

Broadly speaking, the options for chapter 3's composition are: (1) All of Lamentations 3 is a later piece of literature than the other poems, belonging to a late- or post-exilic community in Judah.[29] (2) A *Golah* group composed Lam 3:21-39 to didactically respond to Lamentations 1-2.[30] (3) Closely related, Lam 3:21-39 represents a later, perhaps late/post-exilic perspective and reaction to Lamentations 1-2 and 3:1-20, 40-66. (4) A *Golah* group composed Lam 3:21-39 to didactically respond to Lamentations 1-2, only to have the Judahite community react by framing it within 3:1-20 and 3:40-66. (5) All of Lamentations 3 is Judahite and exilic.

It is my contention that option (5) is the most likely, though the argument of the present thesis – particularly Bakhtin's concept of "passive double-voicing" – would fit well with option (4) as well. That other options have gained a hearing is due to a fundamental misunderstanding of the rhetorical

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[27] Proponents of this view include Salters, *Lamentations*; Westermann, *Lamentations*; Middlemas, *The Templeless Age*; and most Continental scholarship.

[28] See J. Middlemas, "Did Second Isaiah Write Lamentations iii?" *VT* 56 (2006): 505-525.

[29] So Salters, *Lamentations*.

[30] So Middlemas, "Did Second Isaiah."

function of 3:21-39. Rather than standing in didactic tension with the rest of the chapter and book, I will argue instead that the evidence for literary cohesion is already present, but the waters have been muddied due to theological assumptions and superficial exegesis. The tight complexity of chapter 3's triple-acrostic structure also undercuts arguments for later redaction, though this is by no means conclusive evidence. Whatever the case, my particular case may fit with a number of arguments for the text's prehistory. While these questions are important, since I place interpretive priority on the final form of the text such differences will play a small role in my analysis. It remains the case that the majority of interpreters of Lamentations continue to see it as literature composed during the Babylonian exile, some time between 587-519 BCE. The internal evidence of the poems fits very nicely into this historical context, even if concrete textual allusions remain absent. Linguistic arguments by Dobbs-Allsopp have strengthened the case for a sixth century BCE date, who rightly expresses unhappiness with the common (and tenuous) methodology of dating according to perceived outlook/theology in a biblical book.[31] Evidence of intertextual allusions between Lamentations, Deutero-Isaiah, and Zechariah 1-2 has also been offered as evidence for an exilic dating.[32] All these threads of argumentation should lead us to conclude that Lamentations as a whole belongs to the exilic period, and was created by and for Judahites.[33] Again, even if one does not share these views on

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[31] F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Linguistic Evidence for the Date of Lamentations," *JANESCU* 26 (1998): 1-36. See also Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "Geography and Textual Allusions: Interpreting Isaiah xl-lv and Lamentations as Judahite Texts," *VT* 57.3 (2007): 367-385.

[32] Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "Lamentations in Isaiah 40-55," in *Great is Thy Faithfulness?*, 55-63; Middlemas, "Did Second Isaiah"; Elizabeth Boase, *Fulfillment of Doom? The Dialogic Interaction between the Book of Lamentations and the Pre-exilic/Early Exilic Prophetic Literature* (LHB/OTS, 437; London / New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006); Patricia Tull Willey, *Remember the Former Things: The Recollection of Previous Texts in Isaiah 40-55* (SBLDS, 161, Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1997); Christopher Seitz, *Word Without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 130-149; Benjamin Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 130; Tod Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 62-79; Michael R. Stead, "Sustained Allusion in Zechariah 1-2," in Mark J. Boda and Michael H. Floyd (eds.), *Tradition in Transition: Haggai and Zechariah 1-8 in the Trajectory of Hebrew Theology* (LHB/OTS, 475, London / New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008), 144-170.

[33] The main alternative theory, though never popular, has dated to the Maccabean period (e.g., M. Treves, "Conjectures sur les dates et les sujets des Lamentations," *Bulletin Renan* 95 [1963]: 1-4). Others note the lack of specific historical reference and suggest the link between the text and particular events is tenuous at best, e.g.,

the pre-history of the poems, the strength of the present thesis should be weighed in relation to the final form of the text as an intentionally redacted work of literature.

b. The Exilic Context of Lamentations

By placing the creation and final editing of Lamentations in exilic Judah, we are drawn into the complex discussion of the so-called "myth of the empty land" of sixth century BCE Judah. Hans Barstad, Niels Lemche, Philip Davies, and Thomas Thompson are key proponents of the view that it is mistaken to think a cataclysmic change in Judahite culture occurred due to forced migration by Babylon. Rather, it is argued, the biblical vision represents an ideological vision not true to lived reality – a theological rather than strictly historical assessment.[34]

In contrast to this, some argue that the archaeological evidence supports a very severe destruction and deportation. Ephraim Stern: "Judah was almost entirely destroyed [...] and its Jewish population disappeared from most of the kingdom's territory."[35] Such an assertion suffers a measure of overstatement, though, and Rainer Albertz offers a more moderate assessment. Working from a figure of about 80,000 for the Judah's population on the eve of Babylonian invasion, Albertz contends that around 20,000 Judahites were deported. And though notoriously difficult to pin down with any confidence, it is not unreasonable to suppose another 20,000 died in war, were executed by the Babylonians, or emigrated to Egypt. If we assume such figures, "then Judah lost approximately half its inhabitants between 600 and 580 and was reduced to a population of some forty thousand. In truth,

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S. J. D. Cohen, "The Destruction: From Scripture to Midrash," *Proof* 2 (1982): 18-39; Iain Provan, "Reading Texts against an Historical Background – Lamentations 1," *SJOT* 1 (1990): 130-143; and *idem*, *Lamentations*, 7-19.

[34] Hans Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah During the "Exilic" Period* (SOFS, 28; Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996); *idem*, *History and the Hebrew Bible: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography* (FAT, 61; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2008); Niels Peter Lemche, *The Israelites in History and Tradition* (LAI; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998); Philip R. Davies, *In Search of "Ancient Israel*, 2nd edn. (London / New York: T. & T. Clark, 2003); Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* (London: Basic Books, 1999).

[35] Ephraim Stern, "The Babylonian Gap: The Archaeological Reality," *JSOT* 28 (2004): 273. See also *idem*, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, Vol. 2: *The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Periods* (732-332 BCE) (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 2001).

the exile meant a severe bloodletting for Judah." This would then have resulted in a 2:1 ratio of those remaining in Judah and those in the Babylonian Golah. "Given the higher proportion of educated individuals in the golah, the two major population elements of the exilic period were of roughly equal importance."[36] Daniel Smith-Christopher also insists that the evidence should convince us of the traumatic severity of Babylonian siege-warfare and deportation.[37] He is particularly insightful here with regards to Lamentations and Ezekiel when he insists that the poetry, while not always reflecting clear and accurate historical data, reflects the "emotional, social, and [...] spiritual impact of the disaster."[38] Whether one takes a maximalist or minimalist position, it is quite clear that the land of Judah was neither completely destroyed nor depopulated during the sixth century BCE. Recent archaeological and material evidence dated to this period make it apparent that Judah remained relatively active despite the Neo-Babylonian military advance. But it also quite clear that the city of Jerusalem was in fact destroyed and the region of Judah deeply affected. Archaeological evidence suggests that the area was razed and burned in the beginning of the sixth century BCE,[39] and this certainly supports a view of deep cultural impact in the region. If one allows the biblical evidence to shed at least minimal light on the historical realities of the period – particularly the failure of religious and cultic continuity – such a view is at least partially supported. Furthermore, the possible connections between the ambiguous poetry of Lamentations and more historically referential works can serve as further evidence of Lamentations as an exilic work, though the ideological nature of the Deuteronomistic sources should give us a measure of pause.

As far as the use of Lamentations in exilic Judah, most agree with the hypothesis that the poems were written as liturgy for public lament rituals. There are many affinities between Lamentations and

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[36] Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.* (Studies in Biblical Literature, 3; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 88-90.

[37] See esp. ch. 2 in Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002).

[38] Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 104.

[39] See the helpful and thorough discussion in Oded Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah under Babylonian Rule* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006).

ANE city laments, and scholars have long noted the similarities and differences.[40] Dobbs-Allsopp argues that, while there is at the very least an indirect literary dependence present – indeed, how could this not be the case within a common cultural setting? – "Lamentations is no simple Mesopotamian city lament. Rather, it represents a thorough translation and adaptation of the genre in a Judean environment and is ultimately put to a significantly different use."[41] The biblical evidence suggests that public laments over Jerusalem seem to have been a reality (Jer 41:4-5; Isa 61:3; Zech 7:2-7; 8:19). There is no direct evidence either way on this question, but it seems the most plausible proposal. What we do know for certain is that in later rabbinic tradition it began to be used in public laments on the ninth of the Hebrew month אב (*Aḇ*), commemorating a myriad of national disasters related to the Jewish people.

In this work, I assume that at the very least the Babylonian military onslaught caused significant cultural and religious upheaval resulting (in part) in the production of complex religio-historical/prophetic literature. These works express a condition of liminality in which continuity and discontinuity stand unresolved. Lamentations is one such work. I therefore place its date of composition between 587 and 519 BCE; it's location, exilic Judah; it's purpose, a theological response to the crisis of faith brought on by Babylon's invasion. My own bias is to place emphasis on the *theological* import of exilic reality, regardless of the exact historical details. Whether or not the actual numbers of those killed and exiled are as high or low as some argue, "the crisis was so traumatic because it was *experienced as* a total abandonment by YHWH."[42] I contend that this bleeds through into Lamentations' poetry.

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[40] There are five extant ancient Sumerian/Babylonian laments over the destruction of cities: *Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur; Lamentations over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur; The Nippur Lament; The Eridu Lament; The Uruk Lament*. See critical editions in *ANET* and *COS*. Some question whether all these texts strictly belong to the same genre, pointing to considerable stylistic and structural diversity. See, e.g., Piotr Michalowski (ed.), *The Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur* (MC, 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989).

[41] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 9.

[42] Parry, *Lamentations*, 7 (his italics).

c. Lamentations at Qumran

The Qumran text of Lamentations is somewhat preserved, though we are missing the most relevant texts for the present study. Four fragments of the book have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls: 3QLam (3Q3, DJD 3:95) contains fragments of Lam 1:10-12 and 3:53-62; 4QLam (4Q111, DJD 16:229-237) contains Lam 1:1-17, the beginning of 1:18, and a very small fragment of 2:5; 5QLam[a] (5Q6, DJD 3:174-177) contains Lam 4:5-8, 11-16, 19-22; 5:3-13, 16-17; and 5QLam[b] (5Q7, DJD 3:178-179) contains Lam 4:17-19.[43] They are written in Herodian script, dating from around the mid- to late-first century BCE, which is also around the time Lamentations was first translated into Greek. Beyond and including the texts at Qumran, there are no ancient editions of Lamentations that would suggest a Hebrew text substantially different from the MT ever circulated, but this may simply be due to historical accident and should not be overstressed.[44] Hillers maintains that the Hebrew text of Lamentations is in "a relatively good state of preservation" and may be trusted to represent a hypothetical Hebrew *Vorlage*.[45] But again, the plurality of textual traditions makes the likelihood of alternate editions of Lamentations very high, even though we do not possess or have yet to discover them. Tov, for instance, classifies 4QLam as a so-called "non-aligned text," meaning that in his view the text disagrees to such an extent with the MT and LXX that it can be viewed as an independent textual witness.[46]

Quotations from Lamentations can also be found in several of the nonbiblical Qumran poems (4Q179, 4Q501, 4Q282 [formerly 4Q241], 4Q439, 4Q445, 4Q453). As for how these texts were used at Qumran, that remains unclear. The assumption by many is that the poems of Lamentations were used liturgically, though for what occasion we do not know. Adele Berlin remarks that "these Qumran poems do not show us the text of Lamentations in the making; they show us the text as a vehicle for

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[43] See the recent full-length study by Gideon R. Kotzé, *The Qumran Manuscripts of Lamentations: A Text-Critical Study* (SSN, 61; Leiden: Brill, 2013).

[44] See Wilhelm Rudolph, "Der Text der Klagelieder," *ZAW* 56 (1938): 101-122; Albrektson, *Studies in the Text*; and Hans Gottlieb, *A Study on the Text of Lamentations* (AJ, 48; Theology Series, 12; Århus: Århus Universitet, 1978).

[45] Hillers, *Lamentations*, 39.

[46] Emanuel Tov, *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 75

propaganda," noting the likelihood that such texts were used to bolster the exilic identity at Qumran *vis-à-vis* the Jerusalem temple.[47] The lament of 4Q501, for instance, decries neither the Babylonians nor the Romans, but unbelieving Jews. Regarding material from Lam 3, we unfortunately possess only one fragment containing bits of 3:53-62 and it sheds no light on the textual history of our section of primary interest (3:21-42a). For that, we must turn to the Septuagint.

d. LXX Lamentations[48]

LXX Lamentations was one of the later translations from the Hebrew and most agree that it relates to the so-called Καίγε-Theodotian group.[49] Dating proposals have ranged between 50 BCE and 100 CE, but regardless of one's decision it fits roughly within late Second Temple Judaism. The resulting translation is relatively literalistic, often producing a forced but rarely unintelligible Greek. Albert Pietersma even suggests we might understand the translation as a kind of interlinear pedagogical tool meant to perpetually acquaint Hellenistic Jews with the Hebrew text.[50] Though each strophe fails to

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[47] Berlin, *Lamentations,* 36-37. See also *eadem*, "Qumran Laments and the Study of Lament Literature," in Esther G. Chazon, Ruth Clements, and Avital Pinnick (eds.), *Liturgical Perspectives: Prayer and Poetry in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Proceedings of the Fifth International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature* (*STDJ*; Leiden: Brill, 2003).

[48] The translation, characterization, and interaction with LXX Lam is based on Joseph Ziegler's Göttingen edition: *Ieremias, Baruch, Threni, Epistula Ieremiae: Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Societatis Litterarum Gottingensis editum* (vol. 15; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006 [repr. 1957]).

[49] The Καίγε-Theodotian group was originally suggested by Dominique Barthélemy in 1963, and refers to a well-defined, pre-Christian approach in revising the Old Greek. See Barthélemy, *Les devanciers d'Aquila* (VTSup, 10; Leiden: Brill, 1963). Some of these characteristics include the use of rabbinic interpretative methods, Second Temple eschatology, stereotyped lexical equivalents, and the common translation of the Hebrew particle גם(ו) with καίγε. Barthélemy concluded that this group of texts is similar enough to techniques attributed to Theodotion to warrant a Καίγε-Theodotian hypothesis. He placed Lamentations in this group. Recently Isabel Assan-Dote (*Baruch, Lamentations, Lettre de Jérémie* [*La Bible D'Alexandrie* 25, 2; Paris: Cerf, 2005]) and Kevin Youngblood ("Translation Technique in the Greek Lamentations," PhD Dissertation [Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004]) have argued for a non-systematic relationship. Of Barthélemy's nine key chief characteristics of the Καίγε-Theodotian tradition, the following are applicable to LXX Lamentations: גם(ו) = καίγε; איש = ανήρ; יצב – נצב = στηλόω; אין = οὐκ ἔστιν when context = future/past; and the elimination of historical presents.

[50] Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, "To the Reader of NETS," in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, xiii-xx (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), xiv.

mimic the acrostic structure of the Hebrew, some manuscripts preserve alphabetic strophe labels.[51] Lamentations is not found in the versions of Aquila and Theodotion, but only Symmachus and LXX; we only have Lam 1-2 in Codex Sinaiticus. Other peculiarities come to light in Ziegler's Göttingen edition. For example, he omits Lam 3:22-24 (the entire ח-stanza) on the basis of nineteen manuscripts, as well as 3:29. The tight structure of the triple-acrostic casts doubt on Ziegler's decisions here, and these verses should probably be considered original. Significantly, the LXX tradition contains an introduction explicitly contextualizing the poems as a work of Jeremiah, facilitating its placement in the Greek canon: Καὶ ἐγένετο μετὰ τὸ αἰχμαλωτισθῆναι τὸν Ἰσραήλ καὶ Ἰερουσαλήμ ἐρηνωθῆναι ἐκάθισεν Ἰερεμίας κλαίων καὶ ἐθρήνησεν τὸν θρῆνον τοῦτον ἐπὶ Ἰερουσαλήμ καὶ εἶπεν κ.τ.λ. Furthermore, this prologue inclines one to identify the ἀνὴρ of Lam 3 as the prophet Jeremiah. While of immense importance and deserving of its own treatment, my priority in this work is the Hebrew text, though I will repeatedly refer back to LXX Lamentations when it may shed interpretive light.

e. Theodicy and Lamentations

i. "Theodicy" in Ancient Texts: Anachronism?

Another important subject for this study is the question of theodicy in the ANE. Is such a move even viable? Theodicy proper is, of course, a thoroughly modern undertaking, and some have expressed concerns of anachronism when applying the category to antiquity.[52] J. Crenshaw even admits as much, but of course insists that the phenomenon is nonetheless real. Presently it will be argued that once the definitional and theological parameters have been properly framed, the term

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[51] See Ziegler for manuscript evidence. Albert Pietersma convincingly argues for the originality of the alphabetic labels in "The Acrostic Poems of Lamentations in Greek Translation," in Leonard Greenspoon and Olivier Munnich (eds.), *VIII Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies* (SBLSCS; Atlanta: Scholars, 1995), 183-201.

[52] Yet some still trace the history somewhat differently. James Aho, for example, sees the pre-modern era as defined by theodicies, while from the nineteenth century on discourse has shifted primarily to anthropodicies. He views this move as precipitating the advent of psychology, political economics, and social anthropology. See his essay, "The Religious Problem of Evil," in Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts, and Michael K. Jerryson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 199-208.

remains quite useful and preferable to a cumbersome circumlocution or neologism. Consequently, it may be applied freely and fruitfully to ancient texts.

With G. W. Leibniz's coining of the term "theodicy" in 1710,[53] he utilized the expression to describe the process of "justifying" (*theodicy* = Θεός + δίκη) the ways of God to a suffering world, thereby vindicating God of moral culpability. Yet the term's meaning has recently been expanded to include a number of diverse projects. Commentators on theodicy have made the observation that it is only within modernity that the issue of evil has occasioned the questioning of faith itself;[54] thus, Leibniz's term has been flipped on its head. John Howard Yoder, for instance, sees in the term's etymology a process by which humans "judge" whether God morally measures up, and it is on this point that he dismisses all attempts at theodicy as idolatrous.[55] Within broader religious, philosophical, and sociological discourse the term has gained a life of its own. Max Weber, for example, states that theodicy can be and has been used for any attempt to render suffering and evil intelligible.[56] Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty suggests that theodicy is "not confined to monotheism, but it is the touchstone of all religions, an existential rather than a theological problem."[57] In commenting on Weber's work, Gananath Obeyesekere extends the definition even further: "When a religion fails logically to explain human suffering or fortune in terms of its system of beliefs, we can say that a theodicy exists."[58]

All such attempts at modifying Leibniz's term are helpful to an extent, yet they potentially raise serious reservations in that they either rest on a sanguine confidence in the human ability to explain

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

[54] For a summary of this shift, see Daniel Castelo, *Theological Theodicy* (Eugene: Cascade / Wipf & Stock, 2012), 1-25; Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1986), 38-69.

[55] See John H. Yoder's unfinished and unpublished 1996 paper, "Trinity Versus Theodicy: Hebraic Realism and the Temptation to Judge God," John Howard Yoder Papers, HM1-48, Mennonite Church USA Archives – Goshen, Indiana. Projected URL: http://replica.palni.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15705coll18.

[56] See Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon, 1993). A similar appropriation is offered by Peter Berger in *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1969), 59.

[57] W. D. O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California, 1976), 1-2.

[58] G. Obeyesekere, "Theodicy, Sin, and Salvation in a Sociology of Buddhism," in Edmund R. Leach (ed.), *Dialectic in Practical Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 11.

(Weber) or begin with the assumption of failure (Obeyesekere).[59] Terrence Tilley, for one, objects to the continued use of the term due to what he sees as intrinsic issues with the project of theodicy itself:

> However, such extended uses of the term blind one to the unique problems and power of the Enlightenment practice of theodicy proper, a practice which serves to marginalize all other discourse about God and evil. [...] The usual practice of academic theodicy has marginalized, homogenized, supplanted, "purified," and ultimately silenced those expressing grief, cursing God, consoling the sorrowful, and trying practically to understand and counteract evil events, evil actions, and evil practices. I have come to see theodicy as a discourse practice which disguises real evils while those evils continue to afflict people. In short, engaging in the discourse practice of theodicy *creates* evils, not the least of which is the radical disjunction of "academic" philosophical theology from "pastoral" counsel. [...] My conclusion is that theodicy as a discourse practice must be abandoned because the practice of theodicy does not resolve the problems of evil and does create evils.[60]

Later on, Tilley concludes that "theodicies do not respond to complaints or laments. They are not addressed to people who sin and suffer. They are addressed to abstract individual intellects who hear purely theoretical problems..."[61] While I do not agree with Tilley's abandonment of theodicy *in toto*, I find his overall critique to be an invaluable warning. There are two major flaws in conventional theodicy: (1) A propensity for abstraction rather than concrete response to human suffering; and (2) An attempt to exhaustively provide *sufficient justification* for evils. Traditional theodicy has not taken seriously enough the epistemic and ontological "size-gap" between humanity and deity,[62] thereby failing to adequately admit the inherently *partial* and *provisional* quality of our theodicies.

We may define *theodicy* loosely as any attempt to pronounce God "Not Guilty" for whatever evils befall human beings and the created order, with the crucial element of *justifying* particular divine action. Among others, James Crenshaw has done perhaps the most work in creating the conceptual

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[59] O'Flaherty's official definition of theodicy is as follows: "When logic fails, and theology fails, irrational resolutions are offered by other modes of religious thought – notably mythology – and these, proving psychologically satisfactory, are acceptable to the members of that faith, however inadequate they may appear to professional philosophers" (*The Origins of Evil*, 2).

[60] Terrence Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 2, 3, 5.

[61] Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy*, 229.

[62] See Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), *passim.*

space for theodicy to be applied to ANE texts,[63] and the publication of Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor's monumental *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* has solidified theodicy as a serious discourse within biblical studies.[64] Certainly, the question of how the existence of a supposedly benevolent deity might be compossible with the existence of evils has plagued human thought at least since the beginning of recorded history. Belief in a just and beneficent deity would seem to preclude the existence of injustice and suffering – at the very least innocent suffering and horrendous evils. Simply put, *"Si Deus est, unde malum?"*[65] Numerous and diverse formulations of the problem of evil have been around at least since the time of Epicurus and Cleanthes, and the question has plagued every theistic religion since in one way or another:

> God, he [Epicurus] says, either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or He is able, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if He is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? or why does He not remove them?[66]

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[63] Aside from his numerous articles, see James L. Crenshaw (ed.), *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (IRT, 4; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); *idem, Defending God: Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[64] Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor (eds.), *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). Articles in this volume cover Egyptian, Akkadian, Hittite, Ugaritic, Hebrew, Jewish, early Christian, and Rabbinic texts. See also *COS I*, where theodicy is listed a type of ANE writing. *Contra* Tilley, whose narrow definition of theodicy leads him to conclude that the term only properly refers to the Enlightenment project exemplified by Leibniz and carried on by "detached" academics in philosophical theology. He is quite wrong to claim, "Constructing theodicies is not a Christian discourse practice before the Enlightenment. [...] Nor do literary texts, texts of protest, or even biblical texts contribute substantially to the tradition of theodicy" (*The Evils of Theodicy*, 229, 234).

[65] "If God exists, whence comes evil?" Likely spoken by Proclus in the 5th century CE. Boethius, in *Consolation of Philosophy* I.4.31, attributes the question to an anonymous Greek thinker. H. Chadwick, though, feels confident that these words "can be securely identified as a verbatim quotation from Proclus *in Parm* 1056.10-16" (*Boethius* [Oxford University Press, 1981], 129. Chadwick cited in Thaddeus J. Williams, *Love, Freedom, and Evil: Does Authentic Love Require Free Will?* (COE, 41; Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2011), 3.

[66] Lactantius, *De Ira Dei* 13; *ANF* 7:271. There is also David Hume's well-known 1776 paraphrase: "Epicurus' old questions are yet unanswered. Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?" (*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merril, 1980], 198).

The goal, of course, has been to provide answers that are both logically consistent and sufficiently justifiable. The result, as we have seen Tilley point out, is often moral ambiguity if not outright abuse for those who suffer. The ethical implications of theodic discourse are not lost on Crenshaw, who shares Tilley's concerns by noting the recent intellectual shift from theodicy to "anthropodicy." Conventional Biblical theodicies[67] each have their own issues, but the most serious is the justification of the deity at the immense cost of human integrity. Nonetheless, I hold that theodicy is not inherently evil or immoral, but rather becomes so when it attempts to be totalizing in nature and thereby becomes incapable of compassion or agnosticism.

ii. Theodicy in Lamentations

While it would be wrong to argue that Lamentations is itself a theodicy, it is certainly the case that the book has both theodic and antitheodic elements. But Johan Renkema provides the essay on Lamentations in the anthology *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, and surprisingly concludes that the poets themselves were "far removed from any form of theodicy."[68] Though elements "akin to theodicy" do seem to appear at first sight, he ultimately argues theodicy proper is absent due to an underlying conviction that Yahweh was not in fact responsible for the disaster.[69] Renkema's unexpected conclusion can be explained by his working definition of theodicy: "a (self-)justification of YHWH's actions or aloofness in the context of (significant) human suffering."[70] He goes on to explain: "While no specific allusion can be found in the book of Lamentations to the self-justification of YHWH, clear

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[67] It would be worthwhile to explore each Biblical variety of theodicy, but for the sake of space we cannot. Crenshaw's chapter titles in *Defending God* provide a helpful overview of the options available: (i) The Atheistic Answer: Abandoning the Quest; (ii) Alternative Gods: Falling Back on a Convenient Worldview; (iii) A Demon at Work: Letting Benevolence Slip; (iv) Limited Power and Knowledge: Accentuating Human Freedom; (v) Split Personality: Reconciling Justice with Mercy; (vi) A Disciplinary Procedure: Stimulating Growth in Virtue; (vii) Punishment for Sin: Blaming the Victim; (viii) Suffering as Atonement: Making the Most of a Bad Thing; (ix) Justice Deferred: Banking on Life Beyond the Grave; (x) Mystery: Appealing to Human Ignorance; (xi) Disinterested Righteousness: Questioning the Problem.

[68] Johan Renkema, "Theodicy in Lamentations?" in Laato and de Moor, *Theodicy in the World of the Bible,* 428.

[69] Renkema, "Theodicy in Lamentations?," 415.

[70] Renkema, "Theodicy in Lamentations?," 410.

reference is made to terrible human suffering and the question is raised as to the relationship between this suffering, the people who are forced to endure it, and YHWH."[71]

Renkema's unique emphasis on divine *self*-justification indicates that for a "theodicy" to be present, divine speech articulating an explanation for the suffering is required.[72] This move swiftly precludes the very possibility of one finding theodicy within Lamentations, a book entirely absent of divine speech. It should be noted, though, that Renkema's *de facto* definition seems to fall within the boundaries of a more general justification of divine behavior in the midst of suffering. Nonetheless, as the essay progresses he places great importance on the presence of *reasoned* and *rational* reflection which – in order to constitute a theodicy – must result in a human acceptance of the explanation, however begrudgingly. So, when Renkema (rightly) notes the presence of theological ambivalence, he understands this as evidence of a *lack* of theodicy: "The extreme tension expressed here by the poets is far removed from theodicy."[73] As an example, when discussing Lam 1:18 Renkema notes that although the statement about Yahweh's righteousness (צדיק הוא יהוה) would seem to provide a "rational" answer to the "why" of Zion's fate, "the important notion associated with theodicy, namely that YHWH's actions satisfy human reason, is evidently absent."[74] That is, there is no clarity concerning the nature of Zion's sin, and "should not be understood, therefore, as a fully rational justification of YHWH's punitive actions. The confession of YHWH's righteousness is more an expression of the pious awareness that YHWH is always right no matter what [...and] cannot function as a sufficient explanation of His actions."[75]

But Renkema's conclusions are flawed in that (i) he unnecessarily constrains the term "theodicy" to the modern, Enlightenment project; and (ii) he claims theodicy is present only when *self-*

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[71] Renkema, "Theodicy in Lamentations?," 410.

[72] Here Renkema points the reader to Ezek 22:23-31, a text containing just such an instance.

[73] Renkema, "Theodicy in Lamentations?," 420.

[74] Renkema, "Theodicy in Lamentations?," 417.

[75] Renkema, "Theodicy in Lamentations?," 418, 419. A similar sentiment is found in Claus Westermann's essay, "The Complaint Against God" in Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal (eds.), *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 233-241. Within lament "the sufferers are encountering something about God which they cannot comprehend and that they have reached the limits of their own intellectual capacity. The sense of awe before the majesty of God prevents any attempt at rationalization" (239).

justification occurs. If the term is only applicable to Enlightenment/post-Enlightenment texts, it should not surprise us that ancient texts would be found lacking theodicy; and, as noted, divine self-justification can hardly occur in a book where the deity is entirely mute. It is my contention that as long as one defines theodicy in a broad enough manner, its presence in ancient religious texts cannot be disputed. If we simply adopt Crenshaw's wider definition of theodicy as an intellectual attempt to pronounce a verdict of "Not Guilty" over the deity and justify divine action in the face of suffering, we will find that such attempts abound throughout Lamentations.

In an article exploring theodicy in Lamentations,[76] Elizabeth Boase draws on Walter Brueggemann's twofold distinction of theodicy in the Hebrew Bible:[77] (i) a theodic settlement; and (ii) a theodic crisis. A theodic settlement consists of a time "of consensus in the community about the kinds of actions that produce (and deserve) good outcomes (according to God's good pleasure) and bad outcomes (according to God's displeasure)."[78] A theodic crisis, on the other hand, befalls a community in times of extreme disaster during which some or all "find the old settlement out of kilter with lived reality that cannot be denied or explained away."[79] I understand a theodic crisis to be the existential situation in which one performs the rhetorical act of antitheodicy, but I prefer the latter term and this will be reflected in my analysis of Lam 3.

But in proposing the existence of *anti*-theodicy, it must be answered just precisely what theodic worldview is being resisted. There are two clear types of theodic solutions offered in Lamentations: (1) retribution theodicy, such as found in the Deuteronomistic and Prophetic traditions; and (2) educative theodicy, as found primarily in the Wisdom traditions. In Lamentations 3, I propose that the rhetorical effect of antitheodicy critiques these two worldviews simultaneously, with contextual emphasis on the hazards inherent in educative theodicy.

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[76] Elizabeth Boase, "Constructing Meaning in the Face of Suffering: Theodicy in Lamentations," *VT* 58.4-5 (2008): 449-468.

[77] Walter Brueggemann, "Some Aspects of Theodicy in Old Testament Faith," *PRSt* 26 (1999): 253-268; also *idem*, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1997), 385-399.

[78] Brueggemann, "Some Aspects of Theodicy," 255.

[79] Brueggemann, "Some Aspects of Theodicy," 257.

First, retribution theodicy, found primarily in the Deuteronomistic and Prophetic traditions. To the question, "Why has this happened?" we hear the answer, "The Lord is punishing us for our sin," with the either implicit or explicit rooting in the covenantal traditions of Israel. This is perhaps the oldest and most common explanation for evil in world religions, and ancient Israel/Judah was no different. This worldview is, of course, rooted in the conviction that one can and should expect justice from the deity, reward for righteousness and punishment for sin. This is even seen clearly in the story of a man blind since birth in the Gospel of John, where Jesus' disciples ask, "Lord, who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? (John 9:2). In the theodic tapestry that is the book of Job, Elihu asserts:

> Therefore, hear me, you who have sense, far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should do wrong. For according to their deeds he will repay them, and according to their ways he will make it befall them. (Job 34:10-11)

Examples among the Deuteronomistic historian and various prophets are of course legion. To take one of many examples, we may consider Ezekiel 22:23-31 as a summary indictment of the Israelites: princes and officials are condemned for murder, being portrayed as lions and wolves tearing their prey; priests have made no distinction between holy and profane, clean and unclean; prophets cover up these crimes, "whitewashing on their behalf, seeing false visions and lies for them" yet declaring these falsehoods as the word of the Lord (Ezek 22:28); ordinary citizens extort and rob, oppressing the poor and the needy, as well as the alien. In this social catastrophe, Yahweh searches for someone to stand between the deity and the land, but the divine search fails. "Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath; I have returned their conduct upon their heads, says the Lord Yahweh" (Ezek 22:31). Throughout the major and minor prophets and the Deuteronomistic historian, these examples are endless. And Lamentations picks up on these themes with explicit claims to Yahweh's retributive involvement:

> "Yahweh has made her suffer for the multitude of her transgressions..." (Lam 1:5)

> "My transgressions were bound into a yoke; by his hand they were fastened together...the Lord handed me over to those whom I cannot withstand." (Lam 1:14)

> "This happened because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests..." (Lam 4:13)

"The punishment of your iniquity, O Daughter Zion, is accomplished..." (Lam 4:22)

In all there are six direct references to sin (חטא; Lam 1:8; 4:6, 13, 22; 5:7, 16), six to "iniquity" (עון; Lam 2:14; 4:6, 13, 22 [2x]; 5:7) and four to "transgressions" (פשע; Lam 1:5, 14, 22; 3:42). Perhaps the clearest instance of retributive theodicy occurs in the exclamation of Lam 1:18: צדיק הוא יהוה כי פיהו מריתי ("Yahweh is justified [in what he has done] because I have rebelled against his command"). The Deuteronomistic worldview is so ingrained that the poets of Lam 3 and 4 even call upon Yahweh to act within this retributive moral framework against Jerusalem's enemies (3:64; 4:21-22).

Still, the clear existence of retributive theodicy is not articulated fully nor embraced without reservation. As is commonly noted – and against the grain of the explicit specifications of sin in the Prophetic material – there is a striking lack of specificity as to the nature of Jerusalem's sin in Lamentations.[80] The result is an ambiguity regarding correspondence between action and punishment, with descriptions of misery far outweighing references to sin. The closest we come to identifying actual sins is in Lam 4:13:

It was for the sins of her prophets
and the iniquities of her priests,
who shed the blood of the righteous
in the midst of her.

So, we can at least say that murder is confessed as a specific sin. Nonetheless, the retribution theodicy remains porous and ambivalent, especially in chapter 1. The reference in Lam 1:8, for instance, occurs within a section which utilizes the language of sexual abuse, giving the reader a picture of Zion as *victim*. Her enemies have "seen her nakedness" (1:8) and she has been raped (1:10). Lam 5:11 explicitly references this violation: "Women are raped in Zion, virgins in the towns of Judah." Commenting on the infamous description of rape in Lam 1:10, Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt comment:

We are compelled to compassion by these images of victimization, and in so far as Yhwh is envisioned as the perpetrator of this crime (Thr 1:12b, 13c, 22b) we are led by the poet to question the ethics of Yhwh's actions. Is there anything that can justify such an abhorrent crime? Our answer, and we believe the poet's answer as well, must be an emphatic No![81]

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[80] Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, 68; Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 32, 61.

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

Unlike the Deuteronomistic and Prophetic traditions, the readers are led to marvel not at Yahweh's righteous judgment, but instead Zion's horrid defilement, eliciting empathy. The stark juxtaposition of retribution theodicy and portraits of extreme suffering – the latter clearly gaining emphasis throughout the poems – results in an effective subversion of retribution theodicy. Indeed, most references to sin are clustered in Lam 1, with very few occurring in the other four chapters (only once in ch. 2), the landscape continually dominated by misery.

The second major tradition found in Lamentations is that of educative, wisdom-like theodicy, loosely echoed in Lam 3:22-39. Verses 22-24, with references to "steadfast love," "mercies," and "faithfulness," allude to God's covenantal promises with the Davidic line (2 Sam 7:15; 1 Kgs 8:23; Ps 89:2, 14, 24-37; Isa 55:3). Significantly, in contrast to the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic includes God obligating himself to Judah regardless of seriousness of sin. And so the remarkable unconditionality found in Psalm 89:28-37:

> Forever I will keep my steadfast love for [David],
>> and my covenant with him will stand firm.
> I will establish his line forever,
>> and his throne as long as the heavens endure.
> If his children forsake my law
>> and do not walk according to my ordinances,
> if they violate my statutes
>> and do not keep my commandments,
> then I will punish their transgressions with the rod
>> and their iniquity with scourges;
> but I will not remove from him my steadfast love,
>> or be false to my faithfulness.
> I will not violate my covenant,
>> or alter the word that went fort from my lips.
> Once and for all I have sworn by my holiness;
>> I will not lie to David.
> His line shall continue forever,
>> and his throne endure before me like the sun.
> It shall be established forever like the moon,
>> an enduring witness in the skies.

But, just as the man of Lam 3 will do, the Psalmist dares to accuse God for having "renounced his covenant" (Ps 89:40; cf. Lam 3:42b: "You! You have not forgiven!"). The expressions of hopeful

confidence are drawn upon in the midst of instability, and are interrogated in the light of present reality.

In Lamentations 3, verses 25-30 explore the attributes of Yahweh: the Lord is "good" to those who "wait for" and "seek" him (3:25). Those who suffer are instructed to be patient while waiting for God to act (3:26). The educative quality of this suffering is described in 3:27, where the poet tells us "it is good for one to bear the yoke in youth," with further admonishment for silence and acceptance (3:28-30). Job complains of the shame of having one's cheek struck (Job 16:10), but the man of Lam 3 is counseled to offer his cheek to the one who strikes (3:30). The educative theodicy is bookended by two expressions of confidence in 3:22-24 and 31-33, these points providing the ground for the theodic reasoning of 3:25-30. And so, the general thrust of the section is that suffering comes from God and therefore is to be shouldered in confidence that Yahweh will come to restore. It is frequently pointed out that the views here share the basic outlook of Job's friends, a point that should be emphasized in the present work. Just as Job had not sinned and the book incessantly searches for a theodicy to explain his suffering, so the poet of Lam 3 searches for justification in light of God's eternal and inviolable covenant to protect Judah. And consider Eliphaz's advice to Job: "See how happy is the man whom God reproves. Do not reject the discipline of the Almighty. He injures, but he binds up; he wounds, but his hands heal" (Job 5:17-18). Similarly, Bildad in light of Lam 3:34-36: "Will God pervert the right? Will the Almighty pervert justice?" (Job 8:3). So, echoing Adele Berlin's apt question, does the man of Lam 3 accept these theodic solutions like Eliphaz and Bildad, or reject them, like Job?[82] It will be my contention that just as the choric function of the theodicies in Job are ironized and subverted, so is the stereotypical theodicy in Lam 3.[83] In fact, Carol Newsom even uses Lam 3 as a way to discuss Job's subversion of the lament tradition:

> In Lamentations [3] the extensively described violence (Lam 3:1-20) serves as a prelude to a word of hope (3:21), grounded in a conviction of the mercies of God (3:22-24). ...Consequently, one should engage in self-examination and confession (3:40-42), drawing attention to one's suffering as motive for divine compassion (3:43-48). Job's act of resistance to this religiously sanctioned violence is to violate the form of

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[82] Berlin, *Lamentations*, 94.

[83] On the subversion of theodicy in Job, see esp. David B. Burrell, *Deconstructing Theodicy: Why Job Has Nothing to Say to the Puzzle of Suffering* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008).

the lament. At the point where the form invites reflection and confession, Job instead calls upon the earth itself not to cover his blood (Job 16:18). What the rhetoric of lament configured as legitimate punishment, Job...reconfigures as murder. The ravaged body serves not as the basis for compassionate appeal, as in Lam 3:43-48, but as the basis for accusation.[84]

It should be noted that it is often argued that Lam 3:37-39 employs a retributive theodicy, but the unique claim of the present thesis is that such a reading is mistaken. Instead, I will argue that this stanza subverts (through irony) Deuteronomistic logic to make the opposite point: Yahweh is not the cause of the present evil.

I concur with Elizabeth Boase's conclusion that, in answer to the question of whether theodicy is present in Lamentations, we must answer yes *and* no. No, because the poems were not constructed to provide a rational explanation to the destruction of Jerusalem. Lamentations is not a theodicy *in se*. But we must also answer yes, for many theodic elements are present. Using the terminology of Hans-Georg Gadamer, rather than addressing the abstract, "freestanding problems" of theodicy, it would be more accurate to understand the poems as attending to the "questions that arise."[85] Even so, the theological ambivalence of Lamentations as a whole mitigates the historical tendency to privilege theodic motifs. "These theodic responses are not the only expressions within Lamentations, and are in fact countered or subverted within the poems."[86] Ultimately, my claim is that though Lamentations' theology is clouded by ambivalence, antitheodicy wins the day.

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[84] Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 137.

[85] Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2nd Eng. edn.; London: Sheed and Ward, 1989), esp. 369-379.

[86] Boase, "Constructing Meaning," 465; and *eadem, Fulfillment of Doom?*, 221-231. See also See also Victor Jeleniewski Seidler, "'Their Hearts Melted and Became as Water.' Lamentations: Ethics After Auschwitz," *EJ* 44.2 (2011): 91-105; Kelly Wilson, "Daughter Zion Speaks in Auschwitz."

3. *Lamentations as Poetry*

In most ways the poetry of Lamentations fits the mold of Hebrew poetry found throughout the Old Testament.[87] There are five important features of the poetry in Lamentations, though, that deserve mention:

a. The Qinah Meter

The *qinah* meter was initially "discovered" by Karl Budde, who describes it as producing a "peculiar limping rhythm, in which the second member as it were dies away and expires."[88] The meter consists of two cola, the second of which must be shorter than the first. It is measured by the number of word stresses – not syllables – in each half line (3 + 2, 4 + 3, 4 + 2 etc.). For example, Lam 1:6a has a 4 + 2 meter:

| And so gone from Daughter Zion | ויצא מן־בת ציון |
| is all her glory | כל־הדרה |

And 1:7d has a 3 + 2 meter:

| Enemies saw her and mocked | ראוה צרים שׂחקו |
| on account of her destruction | על משבתה |

Budde argued that the meter was often used in funeral dirges, and his assessment has been widely accepted (though of course refined). He does seem to have overdetermined the connection between the *qinah* meter and the funeral dirge, though, as the meter occurs outside of dirges (e.g., Isa 1:10-12;

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[87] See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (JSOTSup 26; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1984); Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Rev. edn.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and Livonia: Dove, 2008), "Introduction."

[88] Karl Budde, "Poetry (Hebrew)" in James Hastings (ed.), *A Dictionary of the Bible*, 4:2-13 (New York: Scribner's, 1902), 5.

40:9ff.; Jonah 2:3-10) and we have evidence of dirges that do not employ the meter (2 Sam 1:17-27).[89] It seems more likely to me that it is linked to laments more generally than specifically to funeral dirges.

b. Enjambment

One of the characteristic marks of Hebrew poetry is a pause between two lines, underscoring parallelism. The conceptual parallels are various, but may generally fall into either conjunctive or disjunctive categories. For example, Lam 5:15 contains a typical clause of conjunctive parallelism:

Our heart has ceased from rejoicing,	שבת משוש לבנו
our dancing was turned into mourning	נהפך לאבל מחלנו

However, Lamentations is full of couplets in which the meaning and syntax spill over from the first line into the second without a significant pause (if at all), and either lack parallelism completely or its presence is vague. Consider Lam 1:10, where we find three of these couplets:

An enemy has stretched out his hand	ידו פרש צר
over all her precious things.	על כל־מחמדיה
Indeed, she saw nations	כי־ראתה גוים
enter her sanctuary –	באו מקדשה
nations that you had commanded,	אשר צויתה
"They shall not enter your assembly."	לא־יבאו בקהל לך

Another good example comes from 3:49-50:

My eyes pour down [tears] and will not stop.	עיני נגרה ולא תדמה
There is no relief	מאין הפגות
until Yahweh looks down and sees	עד־ישקיף וירא
from the heavens.	יהוה משמים

This poetic feature is known as enjambment. Robert Gordis: "In Lamentations this divergence [between metric pattern and meaning] is so common that it may fairly be regarded as a special

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[89] Hillers, *Lamentations*, 18-19.

characteristic of the poet."[90] Indeed, over two-thirds of the couplets contain enjambment. It dominates the landscape of Lam 1-2, decreases in 3-4, and is nearly absent in chapter 5. F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp has done perhaps the most work in analyzing enjambment in Lamentations, producing an exhaustive taxonomy of occurrences and types.[91] He suggests that its presence gives the poems "a palpable sense of forward movement,"[92] encouraging, even forcing, the reader to continue as meaning becomes confused, reversed, and spills beyond the confines of "proper" poetic form. Lamentations 2:22a, for example, displays what Dobbs-Allsopp has described as an ironic twisting of expectations, and contends that such instances should be carefully translated to properly convey the poetic device being employed:

You invite, like on a festival day,	תקרא כיום מועד
my terrors from all around.	מגורי מסביב

The first line announces a joyous religious feast, but the second reverses initial expectations and imbues the line with tragic irony. The "half" or "provisional" meanings of the first orphaned line "are momentary and may counteract or clash with the 'whole' meanings that arise once the sentences are completed."[93]

c. Genre

There has been endless debate concerning the genre of Lamentations, and traditional historical critical research – with its proclivity toward fragmentation rather than holism – has focused on the individual poems rather than the book as a whole. Still, a number have sought to analyze the work as a unified literary expression. Rainer Albertz, Johan Renkema, and Adele Berlin think Lamentations

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[90] Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations* (Rev. edn.; New York: Ktav, 1974), 120.

[91] F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "The Enjambing Line in Lamentations: A Taxonomy (Part 1)," *ZAW* 113 (2001): 219-239; *idem*, "The Effects of Enjambment in Lamentations (Part 2)," *ZAW* 113 (2001): 370-385. He also notes and analyzes occurrences of enjambment in his 2002 commentary.

[92] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 19.

[93] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 20.

constitutes a significant development in Israel's literary history.[94] The poets "had to find a new mode of expression in order to record their thoughts and experiences and they succeeded in doing so by combining existing genres and motifs."[95] Berlin calls this unique work a "Jerusalem Lament," one which questions how one could sing about Zion when the city, temple, and land lay in ruins, and therefore ultimately mourns Jerusalem's destruction.[96] After the fall of Jerusalem – an unthinkable violation of covenant solidarity – the people of Yahweh were forced to cope with the theological/social upheaval by creating this new genre. Presently there are four views on the table as possible answers to the question of poetic genre: communal dirges, communal laments, city-laments, or mixed genre poems.

Hermann Gunkel, who in 1929 paved the way for modern form critical approaches to the book, built upon the seminal work of his student Hedwig Jahnow.[97] Gunkel classified Lam 1, 2, and 4 as communal dirges, Lam 3 as a mixed genre poem that contains elements of both individual lament (Lam 3:1-17, 48-66) and communal lament (Lam 3:40-47), as well as wisdom material (Lam 3:25-39), and Lam 5 as a communal lament.[98]

Chapter 5 has been the least controversial due to its form being less convoluted and it is generally agreed to be a simple variation on a communal lament. Most pertinent to the present project, chapter 3 has been notoriously difficult to define as it contains elements from several genres merged into a curious amalgamation quite unique among any other OT poem. Indeed, this ambiguity of genre functions as a poetic device. As for the major difference between the dirge and the lament, this is found in whether or not the poetry addresses the deity in the second person. If there is a direct

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[94] Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 158-159; Johan Renkema, *Lamentations* (HCOT; Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 63-64; Berlin, *Lamentations*, 24-25.

[95] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 63.

[96] Berlin, *Lamentations*, 24-25. She also identifies Pss 74, 79, and 137 as Jerusalem Laments.

[97] Hermann Gunkel, "Klagelieder Jeremiae," in Gunkel *et al.* (ed.), *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (2nd edn.; Tübingen, 1929), 3:1049-1052; Hedwig Jahnow, *Das hebräische Leichenlied im Rahmen der Völkerdichtung* (BZAW, 36; Giessen: Töpelmann, 1923).

[98] See Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *An Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (trans. James D. Nogalski; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998).

address, this signals an element of lament rather than dirge, the latter of which simply mourns and expresses pain.[99] Whatever the case, Gunkel's work has been widely accepted.[100]

Claus Westermann has taken a different direction by arguing that the communal lament – *not* the funeral dirge – dominates the underlying genre and therefore the dirge only supplements the poems. Because Lamentations continually addresses the deity, he identifies Lam 1, 2, and 4 as communal laments with elements of the dirge interspersed, Lam 3 as a mixed genre poem, and Lam 5 as more of a "pure" communal lament.[101] Whatever one's conclusion on this question, it is clear that elements of both the communal dirge and lament are present throughout Lamentations.

As already briefly mentioned, Lamentations has often been noted for its similarities to ANE city-laments, though its precise function in this respect is debated. Samuel Kramer was the first to explicitly argue the Sumerian city-lament genre had direct literary influence on Lamentations.[102] Rudolph denies this direct influence,[103] and T. F. McDaniel finds it "inconceivable" that the writer of Lamentations could have been exposed to Mesopotamian laments, so he would not have been able to imitate the style.[104]

Such assertions are fairly overstated. If Lamentations was indeed composed sometime between 587-519 BCE, as I have argued above, then it seems quite reasonable to expect that the composer(s) of this text would have come in contact with the Mesopotamian lament literature. As already noted, I am compelled by arguments set forth by Dobbs-Allsopp that Lamentations represents a creative

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[99] Xuan Huong Thi Pham, *Mourning in the Ancient Near East and the Bible* (JSOTSup 302; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); Saul M. Olyan, *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[100] Among those who have followed Gunkel are Nötcher and Rudolph. See Friedrich Nötcher, *Die Klagelieder* (EB; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1947); Wilhelm Rudolph, *Die Klagelieder* (KAT; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1962).

[101] Westermann, *Lamentations*, 1-11.

[102] Samuel N. Kramer, *Sumerian Literature and the Bible* (AnBib, 12; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1959), 185-204.

[103] Rudolph, *Die Klagelieder*, 9.

[104] T. F. McDaniel, "The Alleged Sumerian Influence upon Lamentations," *VT* 18 (1968): 198-209. Also see Westermann, *Lamentations*.

adaptation of the ANE city-lament genre.[105] He sees no less than nine important features in common between Lamentations and ANE city laments: subject and mood, structure and poetic technique, divine abandonment, assignment of responsibility, divine agent of destruction, destruction, weeping goddess, lamentation, and restoration of the city and return of the gods.[106]

Nonetheless, there are notable differences, the most significant of which is "the complete absence in Lamentations of any mention of God's return to Jerusalem or the restoration of the city and temple. These are not only prominent motifs in the Mesopotamian city laments, they represent these laments' *raison d'être*."[107] Some have suggested that though the return/restoration motif is absent, there are nonetheless a number of passages in Lamentations that should be interpreted more hopefully – the prime candidate often being Lam 3:21-39. The ostensible presence of such hopeful sections has led some to imagine Lamentations' use in lament liturgy near the temple's imminent rebuilding.[108] This seems weak ground on which to envision the books liturgical function, though, as I will argue in the exegesis below. The "hopeful" sections are so thoroughly contextualized by tragic material that these approaches to ch. 3 are quite strained.

The fact that Lamentations shares features with all the forms above but is not synonymous with any has led most recent interpreters to simply think of the book as a collection of mixed genre poems. For the focus of the present thesis, undoubtedly most of Lam 3 represents an oral tradition of ANE individual lament.[109] I follow the intuitions of Heath Thomas that "the poetry cannot be understood properly without recognising the usage of the variety of these elements at work within it. The reason is because Lamentations' poetry exploits the encyclopaedia of literary genre, modifying it for its own

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[105] See F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (BibOr, 44; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1993).

[106] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 9.

[107] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 10.

[108] Kraus, *Klagelieder* (*Threni*). See Childs, *Introduction*, 591-593.

[109] See Alan Lenzi, "Invoking the God: Interpreting Invocations in Mesopotamian Prayers and Biblical Laments of the Individual," *JBL* 129.2 (2010): 303-315.

purposes."[110] There is so little text critical evidence to support the splicing of the poems into the original oral forms that I place priority on interpreting Lamentations as an intentionally constructed whole, all the while accepting the likelihood that different sections have varied pre-histories.

d. Acrostic Structure

The acrostic poem was used in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, and we have several occurrences in the OT (e.g., Ps 119; Prov 31:10-31; Nah 1). In Lamentations, chapters 1-4 follow an alphabetic acrostic pattern, though none are entirely identical. In chapters 1, 2, and 4, each verse begins with the subsequent letter of the Hebrew alphabet (א, ב, ג, etc.), while in chapter 3 the acrostic is intensified in that each *line* begins with the appropriate letter, and is repeated three times each. So, three א lines, three ב lines, three ג lines, etc. The overall structure can be seen in this chart:[111]

Lamentations 1	Lamentations 2	Lamentations 3	Lamentations 4	Lamentations 5
acrostic	acrostic	acrostic	acrostic	not acrostic
22 verses with 3 lines each	22 verses with 3 lines each	66 verses with 1 line each	22 verses with 2 lines each	22 verses with 1 line each
1 Strophe = ——————— א ——————— ———————	1 Strophe = ——————— א ——————— ———————	1 Strophe = ——————— א ——————— א ——————— א	1 Strophe = ——————— א ———————	——
66 lines פ – ע	66 lines ע – פ	66 lines ע – פ	44 lines ע – פ	22 lines ——

[110] Heath A. Thomas, *Poetry and Theology in the Book of Lamentations: The Aesthetics of an Open Text* (HBM; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 80. Thomas uses the term "encyclopaedia" in the context of identifying "cultural references" through Umberto Eco's semiotics.
[111] Adopted and slightly edited from Parry, *Lamentations*, 13.

Apart from the curious switching of the order of ע and פ, Lamentations 1 and 2 have exactly the same pattern.[112] Excepting Psalm 119, Lamentations 3 is the largest acrostic in the OT. While chapter 5 is lacking in the acrostic form, it nonetheless retains an alphabetic "aura" in that it contains 22 verses (the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet).

Numerous suggestions have been offered as to the potential significance of the acrostic in Lamentations. A mnemonic device for pedagogy and/or an artistic device are the most likely candidates, though it is certainly the case that deeper intentions are present. Heath Thomas rightly comments that "it is unlikely the extraordinary grief and emotional outpouring, not to mention the literary artistry of Lamentations, is wasted in a mere 'exercise of style' for pedagogy."[113] We may only guess, but the two options I find compelling are: (1) *A way to structure trauma and chaos*. Kathleen O'Connor argues that "the alphabetic devices embody struggles of survivors to contain and control the chaos of unstructured pain, and the variations among the poems reflect the processes of facing their deadening reality."[114] And: (2) *A way to capture the breadth of destruction*. That is, the acrostic may provide a sense of completeness of expression. Norman Gottwald has influentially suggested that the author "wished to play upon the collective grief of the community in every aspect, 'from *Aleph* to *Taw*,' so that the people might experience an emotional catharsis."[115] Most recently, Thomas has emphasized the visual physicality of the acrostic that literally compels the reader forward.[116] That the acrostic poems cover the A to Z of suffering certainly seems plausible, but is more properly thought of as a

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[112] The Qumran text of Lamentations 1 (4QLam^a) follows the פ – ע order. In the MT, it is unclear why Lam 1 follows one order and Lam 2-4 follows another. It is possible that the order of the Hebrew alphabet was not yet fixed and either order was recognized as legitimate (cf. Ps 119 and Prov 31). If this is the case – which seems most likely – no significance need be read into the order. Renkema notes other ancient alphabetic evidence that suggest this was the case, though he opts for a pragmatic explanation, viz., the change was made in order to avoid the scrolls of Poems 1 and 2 getting mixed up and read in the wrong order (Renkema, *Lamentations*, 47-49).

[113] Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*, 81. Thomas here is following the lead of Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, 25-26. They are critiquing the views of, e.g., Westermann, who argues the acrostic is merely a stylistic artifice, a secondary addition inserted after the original oral laments (*Lamentations*, 99-100).

[114] O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, 12.

[115] Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, 30. O'Connor also picks up on this suggestion in *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*.

[116] Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*, 82.

consciously *theological* reading rather than historical. Whatever the case, the acrostic structure also signals the unity of the present form of the text and should be taken into consideration in interpretation.[117]

e. Literary and Thematic Structure

Modern scholarship on Lamentations has been dominated by the opinion that, while the individual poems are tightly structured, the book *as a whole* lacks any discernible structural pattern.[118] Many recent interpreters have been reconsidering this approach and have attempted in various ways to discern an overall arrangement.[119] While there is certainly no plot throughout the book, a dynamic sense of forward movement is undeniable. The alphabetic acrostic combined with enjambed lines propels the reader forward, and the radical intensification of form in ch. 3 has signaled to many its pivotal role in interpreting the book. William Shea has suggested that the book as a whole reflects the *qinah* meter like many of the individual verses. Like a 3 + 2 stress pattern in a verse, Shea contends the book as a whole is 3 + 2 chapters, and chs. 1-3 have a 2 + 1 pattern.[120] This leads to a "limping" feel when one reads the book in its entirety, reaching a climax in ch. 3 and quietly dying off by the end of ch. 5. This is quite suggestive and potentially fruitful, but ultimately inconclusive.

With numerous paratactic lines, violent shifts in outlook, and varying speaking voices, it is understandable that many interpreters have simply denied the unity of Lamentations. At most, it is argued that Lam 1-2 (and maybe ch. 4) were an original unit; chapters 3 and 5 have often been seen as independent literary creations haphazardly thrown in the midst of the other laments so that at present we simply have a confusing mixture of poetry. The present study goes against this tendency and follows the recent trend that, at the very least, we should attempt to interpret Lamentations in its

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[117] See Elie Assis, "The Alphabetic Acrostic in the Book of Lamentations," *CBQ* 69.4 (2007): 710-724; *idem*, "The Unity of the Book of Lamentations," *CBQ* 71.2 (2009): 306-329.

[118] E.g., Rudolph, *Die Klagelieder*; and Kraus, *Klagelieder* (*Threni*).

[119] By far the most ambitious attempt at identifying an overall structure is that of J. Renkema. See ch. 2 for an assessment.

[120] William H. Shea, "The *qinah* Structure of the Book of Lamentations," *Bib* 60 (1979): 103-107.

final form as an intentionally crafted work of art. Recent research has availed itself of literary theory and understanding the aesthetic quality of poetry. Explorations into the use of metaphor,[121] voicing techniques,[122] poetic structure,[123] repetition,[124] and parallelism[125] are now quite common in any treatment of Lamentations. According to Longman, and Dillard, Lamentations fits what is known as a "tragic structure" in literary theory, displaying rising action (chs. 1-2), climax (ch. 3), and falling action (chs. 4-5).[126] Among the difficulties with maintaining this view are anachronistic eisegesis and a misconstrual of ch. 3's function,[127] and it should be noted that when I speak of "tragedy" in Lam 3 I am not referring to such structural commitments. As already noted, I follow Dobbs-Allsopp's lead regarding tragic elements.

Elizabeth Boase structures the poems through a list of "thematic units" including: *description of misery* (1:1-6, 7-11; 2:11-19; 20-22; 3:48-54; 4:1-10, 17-20; 5:1-18); *divine responsibility* (1:12-20; 2:1-8; 3:1-18, 42-47; 4:11-12); *future fate of the enemy* (1:21-22; 3:55-66; 4:21-22); *confidence in Yahweh* (3:19-24. 31-33); *wisdom-like units* (3:25-30, 34-39); *call to confession* (3:40-41); *extended treatment of sin* (4:13-16); *praise of Yahweh* (5:19); *future restoration of Jerusalem* (5:21-22).[128] Even so, Hillers nicely summarizes the structural situation: "Neither narrative nor logical sequence is a dominant feature in contributing to

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[121] Knut Heim, "The Personification of Jerusalem and the Drama of Her Bereavement in the Book of Lamentations," 129-169 in Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham (eds.), *Zion, the City of Our God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Antje Labahn, "Fire from Above: Metaphors and Images of God's Actions in Lamentations 2:1-9," *JSOT* 31 (2006): 239-256.

[122] William Lanahan, "The Speaking Voice in the Book of Lamentations," *JBL* 93 (1974): 41-49.

[123] Bo Johnson, "Form and Message in Lamentations," *ZAW* 97 (1985): 58-73; Renkema, *Lamentations*; Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 20-23.

[124] Heath A. Thomas, "The Liturgical Function of Lamentations," 137-147 in Matthias Augustin and Hermann Michael Niemann (eds.), *Thinking Toward New Horizons: Collected Communications to the XIXth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Ljbljana 2007* (BEATAJ, 55; Frankfurt: Lang, 2008).

[125] Barbara Kaiser, "Reconsidering Parallelism: A Study of the Structure of Lamentations 1, 2, and 4," PhD Dissertation (University of Chicago, 1983).

[126] Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (2nd edn.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 349.

[127] See Heath A. Thomas, "Holy Scripture and Hermeneutics," 5-9 in Parry and Thomas, *Great is Thy Faithfulness?* for a brief critique.

[128] Boase, *Fulfillment of Doom?*, 44-50.

the structure of Lamentations."[129] Given this apparent impasse, I find most suggestive the insights of trauma studies in illuminating the psychological undercurrents of the poems in Lamentations. Seminal in this regard has been Daniel Smith-Christopher's *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, where he devotes a substantial section to Lamentations and Ezekiel.[130] He explores Lamentations through the psychological insights of refugee studies and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD disorients the victim as they suffer from recurrent intrusive memories, dreams, feelings of repetition of the destruction and violence, crippling depression, detachment, and estrangement. Secondary trauma is a widely documented phenomenon, and many studies have analyzed the potential for entire people groups to experience PTSD as a collective whole. Furthermore, these symptoms often persist for many years after the event itself, generating cross-generational passing of symptoms.

Recurring memories of horrors repeatedly show up in Lamentations – the "intrusive memories" of PTSD – including cannibalism (Lam 2:12; 4:4, 9-10), famine (Lam 2:11-12; 4:4-10), rape (Lam 1:10; 5:11), and slaughter (Lam 1:1; 2:21). Smith-Christopher underscores the importance of reading Lamentations as, among other things, a product of "state-sponsored terrorism."[131] Since Lamentations contains language and concepts quite similar to other ANE works, these similarities have been marshaled as grounds to doubt the historical veracity of the trauma referenced by the poems. But Smith-Christopher argues forcefully against those who would dismiss Lamentations' poetry as stereotypical hyperbole containing little to no truth of any underlying disaster. His conclusion in this section is worth quoting at length:

> That language is demonstrably stereotypical – in either the Bible or the modern Mediterranean cultures – is not the same thing as saying that a language is demonstrably fraudulent – or that it is language that is not reacting to real trauma. [...] If we are able to read stereotypical language of the Bible in reference to suffering – and particularly the suffering involved in siege warfare – as a measure not so much of the historical details of the disaster or catastrophe, but rather as a measure of the emotional, social, and obviously therefore spiritual impact of the disaster (after all, this is religious literature), then our analysis of

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[129] Delbert Hillers, "Lamentations, Book of," *ABD* 4:137.

[130] Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 75-104. See also Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010); Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009). See too Kathleen O'Connor's intriguing study on Jeremiah through the lens of trauma theory: *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012).

[131] Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 76.

a good deal of the biblical literature in relation to the exile would need to be rethought. [...] To read Lamentations in this light, albeit in stereotypical language, is once to recover Lamentations as a measure of the psychological and spiritual crisis of the exile.[132]

More recently Heath Thomas has offered a reflection on psychological analysis and Lamentations research.[133] He correctly notes that "past psychological research has provided another way of interpreting the almost Janus-like theology of Lamentations. It reads the tensions in the book as indicative of real-life turmoil when dealing with grief and trauma."[134] This neatly sums up what I find to be a compelling key to understanding the structure of Lamentations. That is, in answer to the question, "What holds these five poems together?" we might answer (in part): A severe theological struggle to understand Yahweh's role in the present disaster. As Berlin puts it, reading the book with literary unity allows it to be understood "as a coherent whole conveying a multifaceted picture of the destruction."[135]

f. The Lyricism of Lamentations

Lamentations is lyric poetry, and one can only fully appreciate the art of this text by noting some of the most salient features of its lyricism. Dobbs-Allsopp highlights two complementary properties of lyric poetry, namely, a lack of narrative and a dependence on the naked effect of language to construct meaning.[136] That is, in place of narrative and character development, we encounter meter, alliteration,

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[132] Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 104, 105. Many of these insights were explored in the Society of Biblical Literature session "Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Contexts," inaugurated in 1999. See Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo (eds.), *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts* (SBLSymS, 43; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008).

[133] Heath A. Thomas, "Relating Prayer and Pain: Psychological Analysis and Lamentations Research," *TynBul* 61 (2010): 183-208.

[134] Thomas, "Relating Prayer and Pain," 187. See also Paul Joyce, "Lamentations and the Grief Process: A Psychological Reading," *BibInt* 1.3 (1993): 304-320; David J. Reimer, "Good Grief? A Psychological Reading of Lamentations," *ZAW* 114 (2002): 542-559;

[135] Berlin, *Lamentations*, 6.

[136] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 12.

rhyme, repetitions, puns, and so on.[137] Another important feature of the poetry is the utilization of "voices." Each voice is "the mask or characterization assumed by the poet as the medium through which he perceives and gives expression to his world."[138] Any structural indicators of plot or argumentation are almost entirely lacking; indeed, nowhere is the Babylonian siege even told as a particular story. The closest we may come to a sustained argumentative logic is 3:25-39, but, as I will argue, the ostensible message is quickly subsumed and ultimately "subordinated to the poem's greater lyrical ambitions."[139]

Interpreters disagree about the precise number of voices found within the book. There is general agreement that in chs. 1-2 there are only two voices: Lady Zion and the Narrator. Whether the man in ch. 3 is the same Narrator from chs. 1-2 is possible but there is significant disagreement over this question. There are also two voices in ch. 4, but it is unclear whether these should be identified with those in earlier poems. Chapter 5 is unique in that it has only one voice – the community.

A powerful feature of the poetic voices is the dialogical character; different voices bring different perspectives at different times. They disagree with one another at points, and even with themselves at times. Lady Zion equivocates between believing Yahweh's punishment to be just (1:18) and raging in protest and claiming divine injustice (2:20). The harshest shift is to be found in the man's transition from 3:1-21 to 3:22-39. Robin Parry rightly notes that "the meaning of the book is found in its dynamic interrelationships rather than in the parts taken in isolation."[140] This dialogical character of the text will prove an important key to exegeting 3:22-42.

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[137] See Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 14-20 for an exploration of the lyric features; also *idem*, "Space, Line, and the Written Biblical Poem in Texts from the Judean Desert," in Marilyn J. Lundberg, Steven Fine, and Wayne T. Pitard (eds.), *Puzzling Out the Past: Studies in Northwest Semitic Languages and Literatures in Honor of Bruce Zuckerman* (CHANE, 55; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 19-61.

[138] Lanahan, "The Speaking Voice," 41.

[139] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 13.

[140] Parry, *Lamentations*, 12.

Chapter 2

Survey of Research and Methodology

Lament is a stance unbecoming for the truly pious.

(RENATE BRANDSCHEIDT)[1]

Das Bedürfnis, Leiden beredt werden zu lassen, ist Bedingung aller Wahrheit.

(THEODOR W. ADORNO)[2]

1. *Introduction*

IN THE PAST SIXTY YEARS OR SO THERE has been a surge of scholarly interest in Lamentations. Especially since 2000, substantial monographs and commentaries have inundated Lamentations studies and pushed it forward in significant ways, most showing a marked interest in the book's theology.[3]

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[1] Brandscheidt, *Gotteszorn und Menschenleid*, 36.

[2] "The need to lend a voice to suffering [literally: "to let suffering be eloquent"] is the condition of all truth." Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), 18. Repr. *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (Abingdon: Routeledge, 2000).

[3] J.M. Bracke, *Jeremiah 30-52 and Lamentations* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2000); Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*; Ulrich Berges, *Klagelieder* (HThKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2002); Berlin, *Lamentations*; Daniel Berrigan, *Lamentations: From New York to Kabul and Beyond* (Chicago: Sheed & Ward, 2002); Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*; Lee, *The Singers of Lamentations*; O'Connor, *Lamentations & The Tears of the World*; *eadem*, "Lamentations" in *New Interpreter's Bible*; Dianne Bergant, *Lamentations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003); Jill Middlemas, *The Troubles of Templeless Judah* (OTM; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); House, *Lamentations*; Boase, *The Fulfillment of Doom?*; Carleen Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations* (SemSt; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007); Tremper Longman III, *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (NIBC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008); Parry, *Lamentations*; Salters, *Lamentations*; Parry and Thomas, eds., *Great is Thy Faithfulness?*; Paul M. Joyce and Diana Lipton, *Lamentations Through the Centuries* (WBBC; Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013); H. Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*.

Norman Gottwald's 1954 *Studies in the Book of Lamentations* was the first time the book's theology was given detailed treatment and is generally considered a watershed in Lamentations studies. Prior to this, discussion of the book's theology was strongly limited, if discussed at all. Most of these early studies emphasize Judah's guilt and nearly all place central importance on the middle of chapter 3 with its message of penitence and hope.[4] The following chapter will survey research centered on the question of theology in Lamentations, moving through four main types – historical critical ("behind" the text), literary ("in" the text), ideological ("in front of" the text), and integrated approaches.[5]

2. *Historical Approaches: "Behind" the Text*

a. *Norman Gottwald and Bertil Albrektson*

For Gottwald the key to Lamentations' theology is the Deuteronomistic worldview of retributive justice: sinners will suffer and the righteous will be vindicated. After Josiah's fervent attempts at reform, the nation ended up suffering a fate worse than at any other time in its history, and this tragedy dominates the theological landscape of Lamentations. This "tension between Deuteronomic faith and historical adversity"[6] is central, and the key question is "why does the nation suffer more than ever before immediately after its earnest attempt at reform?"[7] This theology of doom is nonetheless balanced by a theology of hope, and Gottwald sees the hope displayed in the structural center of the book (3:33) as foundational for countering despair. While the Deuteronomic theology has a dark side (viz., disobedience brings about severe punishment), it also contains the seeds for covenantal hope: "The whole burden of [the poet's] message was the indestructibility of Jahweh's

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[4] Westermann, *Lamentations*, 24-31; Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 1-34.

[5] Cf. Anthony C. Thiselton, "'Behind' and 'In Front of' the Text: Language, Reference and Indeterminacy," in Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene and Karl Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation* (SHS, 2; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 97-120. For more exhaustive surveys, see C. W. Miller, "The Book of Lamentations in Recent Research," *CBR* 1 (2002): 9-29; Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*, 17-49; *idem*, "A Survey of Research on Lamentations (2002-2012)," *CBR* 12 (2013): 8-38.

[6] Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, 53.

[7] Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, 51.

purposes of love and justice and, in consequence, the seed of hope in a restored Israel."[8] But one should not have the impression that Gottwald myopically committed himself to uncovering *only* Deuteronomic strains of thought. He rightly notes that though Lamentations assumes the validity of prophetic teaching, "with respect to the historical enigma of Israel's life, it foreshadows the Wisdom literature by pointing finally to the mystery of the divine ways."[9] Nonetheless, Gottwald does tend to portray Judah as a society having been *permanently* reformed along Deuteronomistic lines so that this particular theodic crisis would have permeated the whole community. Paul House rightly notes that the OT evidence sketches Josiah's reforms as "temporary at best, and a government sponsored episode not supported by the people at worst."[10]

Bertil Albrektson engages in an extensive interaction with Gottwald's monograph, appreciating much but ultimately he disagrees about the supposed tension between Deuteronomic faith and present tragedy. On the contrary, Josiah's reforms were not entirely successful, and, in light of Deuteronomy 28, the people should in fact have *expected* curses and not blessings. So, rather than a tension with Deuteronomic theology, "the historic outcome becomes a seal on the truth of the Deuteronomic faith."[11] Furthermore, alongside the Deuteronomic theology Albrektson sees an important thread of Zion theology – viz., the view that Yahweh has elected Jerusalem as an eternal home, making it impenetrable (Lam 2:15; 4:12, 20; 5:19; Pss 46, 48, 76, 84, 87; Isa 37:33-35).[12] The key to Lamentations' theology is shifted, then, from Gottwald's thesis to "the tension between specific religious conceptions and historical realities: between the confident belief of the Zion traditions in the inviolability of the temple and city, and the actual brutal facts."[13] In this context, the Deuteronomic theology actually helps *explain* the dissolution of Zion theology's naïve sense of invincibility by pointing to Yahweh's faithfulness to the covenant – curses and all!

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[8] Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, 56.

[9] Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, 51.

[10] Paul House, "Outrageous Demonstrations of Grace," 29 in Parry and Thomas, *Great is Thy Faithfulness?* See Nadav Na'aman, "The 'Discovered Book' and the Legitimation of Josiah's Reform," *JBL* 130.1 (2011): 47-62.

[11] Albrektson, *Studies in the Text*, 219.

[12] Albrektson, *Studies in the Text*, 219-230.

[13] Albrektson, *Studies in the Text*, 230.

Though Gottwald has heavily influenced the interpretive trajectory in Lamentations studies, Albrektson's thesis enjoyed more support in the literature following his publication. Nonetheless, their methodology has been widely followed. Their followers sought the answer to the book's theology through identifying a single key or tradition "behind the text." Most now feel that this tradition-history approach was far too stringent in its interpretive criteria, as no single tradition can adequately cover the breadth of Lamentations' theological diversity.[14]

b. Claus Westermann

Claus Westermann approaches Lamentations through form criticism, and seeks to uncover the books theology from the text's earliest oral formulations. As already mentioned, Westermann concludes that the acrostic is derivative, merely an aesthetic frame that actually *hinders* proper understanding of the theology in the text. He insists that what we are dealing with in these poems is not theological reflection but a raw, direct event. The complaints are "prayers in which something happens between man and God, between God and man," and are therefore "determined by a sequence of events" rather than a "mental logic" (*gedanklichen Logik*).[15] Westermann rightly refuses to take ch. 3 as the "true heart" of the book (as many have and continue to do), and instead seeks to elevate the role of lament and complaint. On form critical analysis, he argues that Lam 3 (specifically the paraenetic section in 3:26-41) represents the final redactional stage of the book. This section, he contends, lamentably weakens the caustic expressions of pain and grief in other sections. For Westermann, lament prayer has an intrinsic value that should not be swallowed by the ostensibly "preferable" theodicy in 3:26-41. He posits a pre-history to the poems consisting of non-acrostic communal laments, and applies a much later date to Lam 3.

Few now embrace Westermann's position, especially since the advent of literary criticism. Most recently, Heath Thomas has offered a monograph arguing for a tight interworking of poetry in the

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[14] See the discussion in Boase, *Fulfillment of Doom?*, 9-12.

[15] Westermann, *Lamentations*, 72.

final form.[16] Renkema rightly notes Westermann's rose-colored view of "complaint-prayer," the category under which he places all but Lam 3:26-41. The latter fails to distinguish between complaint intended as prayer (with implicit faith in Yahweh; e.g., 1:9c, 11c, 20-22; 2:20-22; 3:55-66), and complaint as an expression of "dissension" and "defiance" (e.g., 3:1-18, 42b-54): "Westermann's obsession with the original form of Lamentations as complaints of the people during the great distress of 587 prevents him from seeing what actually happened: not distress followed by lament-prayer – as was usually the case – but distress followed by disillusionment! [...] In a wrecked and ravaged Zion they stood and wondered in astonishment as to what the relationship might be between God and the horrors they were being forced to undergo."[17] Still, Westermann's high valuation of lament/complaint prayer is to be lauded.

3. *Literary Approaches: "In" the Text*

a. Bo Johnson

Bo Johnson is similar to Gottwald in that he believes Lamentations was written to respond to a specific theological question: "How can the events of 587 BCE be associated with a continued and vital faith in [Yahweh]?"[18] But rather than tracing an external history of tradition to unlock the theology, he approaches the interpretive task through examining literary structure. He argues that the poetry itself, when read properly, guides the reader through a process of understanding: Excluding chapter five,[19] each poem consists of one-half "fact" followed by one-half "interpretation." The central verses of each of the first four poems (Lam 1:11-12; 2:11-12; 3:21-42; 4:11-12) function as pivotal transition points between the "fact" and "interpretation" sections.[20] Johnson believes that Lam 3, as the core of the book, provides the main theological answer to the question that the poems raise. So, the proper answer is

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[16] Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*.
[17] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 61-62, 63.
[18] Johnson, "Form and Message," 59.
[19] Johnson, "Form and Message," 70-73.
[20] Johnson, "Form and Message," 58-73.

that God has been angry and punished the people for sin, but this was justified and the people must stop complaining and repent (3:37-41).

b. Johan Renkema

Johan Renkema has produced the most ambitious literary analysis of Lamentations to date. He proposes interpreting the book's theology by uncovering a "concentric logic" on display in the text itself, a structure that is indeed attested in Canaanite and Hebrew poetry.[21] The concentric structure is designed to push the reader to the center of the poem to discover the theological "key" of each poem.[22] Important to note is the influence of the Kampen School on Renkema's work, producing the methodological assumption that ancient readers/hearers of ancient Canaanite or Hebrew poetry would in fact *expect* this concentric logic and wait to interpret the work until it was completely recited.[23]

The Kampen School has offered a ten-step methodology to ground poetic analysis,[24] and their work has provided a rigorous context in which to interpret ancient works and produced significant advances in scholarship on Northwest Semitic poetry. A concentric structure works against our modern tendency to read in linear progression. Repetition and allusion provide structural markers:

> A: certain ideas introduced
>   B: another idea introduced
>   C: the heart of the poem
>   B(1): some element of B repeated
> A(1): some element of A repeated

Renkema analyzes Lamentations using this structural analysis and argues that the theological core for each lies in its "heart" (Lam 1:11; 2:11; 4:11; and 5:11). Lamentations 3, on the other hand, has concentric structure of a different sort: mirroring cantos (Lam 3:1-33 and 1:34-66), making the

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[21] Johan Renkema, "The Literary Structure of Lamentations (I-IV)," in Willem van der Meer and Johannes C. de Moor (eds.), *The Structural Analysis of Biblical and Canaanite Poetry* (JSOTSup, 74; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 294-396.

[22] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 72-79. Renkema uses the term "kernel" to describe the theological key of each poem.

[23] Renkema, "The Literary Structure," 294.

[24] See van der Meer and de Moor, *The Structural Analysis*, vii-ix, 1-61.

theological heart a combination of Lam 3:17 and 3:50: "My soul was denied peace; I forgot what goodness is // Until Yahweh looks down and sees from the heavens." Furthermore, Renkema argues the book as a whole is concentric so that the central message comes from Lam 3, and especially 3:33. The theology of the book, then, can be captured in the question, "Can [Yahweh] continue to allow such agony, can he persist in punishment, when witnessing the pain of his beloved people?"[25] He makes the highly suggestive claim that the poetry is designed to appeal to God *against* God[26] – an underscoring of the *opus alienum Dei contra opus proprium Dei*. Similarly, in the context of discussing theodicy in lament Psalms, Sybille Rolf has argued that such poetry urges us "gegen Gott zu Gott zu fliehen."[27]

Yet for all the remarkable parallels in his concentric analysis, Renkema's work falls short at points by severely forcing certain echoes and repetitions. For instance, he links "who has seen affliction" (ראה עני) with "He has consumed my flesh and my skin" (בשׂרי ועורי בלה), and it is far from obvious one should make any significant connection here besides the fact that the latter is simply a form of "affliction." Also troubling is the inconsistency of methodological results (e.g., no unifying terms are present between Lam 3:13-15 and 3:52-54). I agree with Heath Thomas's critique that it "is not certain that concatenation carries the pragmatic force (the intended effects) that Renkema points out. It may only suggest that the poem is intentionally and artfully designed."[28] Such an evaluation seems the most likely case in my view, and one should not approach the text as though concentric logic is the only (or most) legitimate way to understand Lamentations' theology.

d. Elizabeth Boase

Elizabeth Boase uses the literary philosophy of Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin who argued that texts speak beautifully when they speak with many voices (polyphony) rather than with one voice

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[25] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 58-71, 337-343.

[26] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 70-71.

[27] "...to escape *from* God *to* God." Sybille Rolf, "Crux sola est nostra theologia. Die Bedeutung der Kreuzestheologie für die Theodizeefrage," *NZSTR* 49.2 (2007): 223-240 (quoting 229).

[28] Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*, 34.

(monologism). The interaction of the many, often divergent voices in a work is termed "dialogism," and Boase's study specifically looks to analyze how Lamentations dialogues with three main motifs from the prophetic traditions: (i) the personification of Jerusalem as female; (ii) the Day of Yahweh; and (iii) the relationship between sin and judgment.[29] While elements of each prophetic motif can be found throughout the book, they are all ultimately transformed and subverted ("double voicing" in Bakhtinian terms). For instance, references to the destruction as Yahweh's punishment for Judah's sin are clearly present at points, and yet the extended, empathetic portrayal of the city mitigates this conclusion. "While the city may have been judged, she is to be viewed with great pity in her extreme degradation and suffering, thus undermining the dominant portrayal of her in the prophetic literature."[30] Furthermore, there is the lack of specificity regarding sin and points where the appropriateness of Yahweh's punishment is overtly questioned (e.g., 1:21-22; 3:42; 4:6; 5:7).

Boase concludes that within Lamentations we encounter an unresolved dialogue around the three prophetic motifs. "The viewpoint that questions Yahweh's actions stands alongside the more orthodox view of the just punishment of sin, giving voice to the inherent, unmerged tensions within Lamentations."[31] Consequently, the theology of Lamentations cannot be reduced to monologic propositions. Rather, it invites further dialogue and theological reflection in the place of shutting down conversation with an ostensible "final word" on the fall of Jerusalem. "As a polyphonic, dialogic text, Lamentations stays true to itself: it expresses pain; it anticipates future words; it remains open and unfinalized. In the end, it finishes as it starts – in pain-filled anticipation of the divine voice and divine comfort."[32]

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[29] She acknowledges the need for similar studies of Lamentations' dialogic engagement with Deuteronomic, Wisdom, Zion, and Davidic traditions.

[30] Boase, *Fulfillment of Doom?*, 241. One hears echoes here of Westermann: "Although the event was recognized as punishment, it remained incomprehensible in its severity" (*Lamentations*, 153).

[31] Boase, *Fulfillment of Doom?*, 242.

[32] Boase, *Fulfillment of Doom?*, 243.

4. *Ideological Approaches: "In Front Of" the Text*

a. Naomi Seidman

Naomi Seidman offers a vigorous feminist response to the presentation of divine violence in Lamentations. The title of her essay, "Burning the Book of Lamentations,"[33] is certainly suggestive of her critical approach to the text. She tells the following story: "In a certain small town in Poland, right after they broke the fast, the Jews would light an enormous bonfire. They would throw the Tisha B'Av liturgy with all its sad poems about the destruction of the Temple into the fire and dance and sing the midsummer night away."[34] Into this bonfire, says Seidman, all abusive texts like Lamentations must be thrown.

Attempting to vindicate the personified feminine city of Jerusalem or "the Daughter of Zion," she claims that justifying Yahweh's complicity in violent destruction occurs at the expense of the feminine. An abrasive example of undervaluing the feminine voice in Lamentations is found in the work of Alan Mintz:

> To deal with this threatened loss of meaning – what amounts to a threat of caprice, gratuitousness, absurdity – Zion as a figure is simply not sufficient; a woman's voice, according to the cultural code of Lamentations, can achieve expressivity but not reflection. And now acts of reasoning and cognition are the necessary equipment for undertaking the desperate project of understanding the meaning of what has happened. The solution is the invention of a new, male figure, the speaker of chapter 3 [...] whose preference for theologizing rather than weeping is demonstrated throughout.[35]

"If we forgive him," Seidman laments, "it is because we are too exhausted to do otherwise."[36] Her work shares a close affinity with the protest theology of David Blumenthal and others.

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[33] Naomi Seidman, "Burning the Book of Lamentations," in Christina Buchmann and Celina Spiegel (eds.), *Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1995), 278-288.

[34] Seidman, "Burning the Book of Lamentations," 281.

[35] Alan Mintz, "The Rhetoric of Lamentations," 9.

[36] Seidman, "Burning the Book of Lamentations," 288.

b. Kathleen O'Connor

Kathleen O'Connor also believes that Lamentations theologically justifies divine violence at the expense of the feminine, but unlike Seidman and others she holds out the hope that the text is simply mistaken. Furthermore, she detects evidence of protest theology in the poems themselves, especially in Lam 2:20, where the appropriateness of Yahweh's acts seem to be deeply questioned. So, instead of the text allowing – and therefore being complicit in – Jerusalem's "abuse," O'Connor avers that

> the book's speakers stand up, resist, shout in protest, and fearlessly risk further antagonizing the deity. They do not accept abuse passively. They are voices of a people with nothing left to lose, and they find speech, face horror upon horror, *and resist unsatisfactory interpretations offered by their theological tradition.* From the authority of experience, they adopt a critical view and appraise and reappraise their situation. The result is a vast rupture in their relationship with God, yet they hold on to God, and in that holding they clear space for new ways to meet God.[37]

Theological tension abounds in the midst of this protest. She says of Lam 1:17: "Like a woman in an abusive relationship, [Lady Zion] agrees Yhwh is justified in his treatment of her because she has 'rebelled against his word' (Lam 1:18a)."[38] Yet O'Connor privileges 3:33 in her theological conclusions on the book, arguing that most of the speakers are simply wrong in claiming that Yahweh has caused such suffering. The primary value of the poems, then, is to provide a theology of witness, a space for truth-telling, even a cathartic outlet for Zion's "unbridled anger at God."[39] She is unequivocal: "We need Lamentations' bracing speech about God for its raw honesty and its iconoclastic power...[but its] insistence on God's punishing violence must be critiqued for our time. It is wrong."[40] O'Connor only finds comfort in the possibility that 3:33 hints at God's powerlessness – a God simply *unable* to prevent evil, and certainly never willing it.[41]

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[37] O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, 123 (my italics).

[38] O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, 27.

[39] O'Connor, "Lamentations," 1043.

[40] O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, 120.

[41] O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, 122. See Robert Kirschner's comments on Apocalyptic and Rabbinic responses (viz., *2 Baruch, 4 Ezra*, and *Lam. Rab.*) to the destruction of the temple in 70 CE: "Among the varieties of Judaism in late antiquity, two basic theodicies emerged from the catastrophe of 70: divine transcendence and divine identification. According to the first, God engineered the Temple's destruction; according to the second, he could not prevent it" ("Apocalyptic and Rabbinic Responses to the Destruction of 70," *HTR* 78.1-2 [1985]: 44).

b. Carleen Mandolfo

Carleen Mandolfo also prioritizes the feminine, devoting most of her monograph to Daughter Zion in Lam 1-2.[42] Methodologically, Mandolfo also employs the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, and finds that a dialogic quality saturates the text of Lamentations, especially in its interaction with the prophets. Unlike Boase's more literary approach, Mandolfo's work is explicitly ideological in nature, writing from a deconstructionist, feminist, and post-colonial perspective. She asks, "How has the poet of Lam 1-2 altered the basic form of the lament genre to facilitate Zion's need to tell a different story? ...Zion (and I) craft a counterstory that resists the myopic identity in which God and his prophets have confined her."[43] This "myopic identity" consists primarily of Zion's characterization as an unfaithful, "whoring" wife, deserving of her husband's (viz., Yahweh's) wrath, with the primary goal being Zion's return to servitude. The power of Daughter Zion's voice is found in her profound challenging of the tacit power relations (male subjugates female).

Building on her previous work in Biblical dialogism,[44] she makes the significant observation that the Didactic Voice – a third-person voice that speaks *of* or *for* God in other dialogic laments, and thus provides the "correct" perspective (hence, didactic) – is on the side of Daughter Zion in Lamentations. Rather than supplying a corrective to Zion's anguished laments and complaints, the Didactic Voice is "co-opted into the ideological world of the supplicant's discourse, with the result that the tension that prevails in the lament psalms seems somewhat relieved in Lamentations. This rhetorical relief, however, comes at the cost of stable or comforting theology."[45] So, whereas in the psalms of lament the Didactic Voice is understood as speaking in support of the prophetic utterances concerning violent, retributive justice, "that same voice in Lam 1-2 has structurally reversed its former perspective and now stands with the supplicant, more or less against the deity and the prophets through whom

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[42] Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets*.

[43] Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets*, 27.

[44] Carleen Mandolfo, *God in the Dock: Dialogic Tension in the Psalms of Lament* (SemSt; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

[45] Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets*, 60.

the deity speaks."[46] This is the only dialogic text in the Bible where such an alignment takes place, and Mandolfo uses this as grounds to figure Zion's speech in Lamentations as a response to God's voice heard in the prophets. Zion, Mandolfo argues, proceeds to expose the unjust construction of the feminine and thereby challenge it.[47]

Such testimony is a cue to Mandolfo of a deeper, underlying issue: the nature and authority of the Bible. She says, "If we care about justice, we must be careful not to approach the Bible, in Bakhtinian terms, as the monologic 'word of the father' that in the end justifies divine violence."[48] She finds in Daughter Zion the courage to join the dialogic structure of the canon and *resist* – not only the texts but the abusing God himself: "But the fact is that God in the Bible *sometimes* (and this is a qualifier Blumenthal stresses) abuses. The issue is not to find some way around that fact, but what we do with it. We must bring voices forward to challenge God's abusing voice. We must not accept his hegemony as narrated uncritically."[49] Daughter Zion in Lamentations 1-2 is one such voice.

c. Deryn Guest

In the same vein, Deryn Guest's work on theology in Lamentations stems from her concern to undo the cycle of feminine degradation in the book.[50] Her contribution is part of the well-known debate over "pornoprophetics," Athalya Brenner's provocative phrase to describe the way Yahweh justifies violence – often sexual – at the expense of women in the OT, who are often described as "wanton" or "whores" throughout the prophets.[51] Guest traces how feminine Jerusalem is depicted as a battered woman: she is raped (Lam 1:10); she is accused of guilt (Lam 1:5, 8); and she confesses guilt (Lam 1:14,

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[46] Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets*, 60.

[47] Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets*, 81-102.

[48] Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets*, 5.

[49] Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets*, 127.

[50] Deryn Guest, "Hiding Behind the Naked Women in Lamentations: A Recriminative Response," *BibInt* 7 (1999): 413-448.

[51] See Athalya Brenner and Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes (eds.), *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1993); Brenner, "Pornoprophetics Revisited: Some Additional Reflections," *JSOT* 70 (1996): 63-86. See also Gerlinde Baumann, *Love and Violence: Marriage as Metaphor for the Relationship between Yhwh and Israel in the Prophetic Books* (Collegeville: Michael Glazier, 2003), 167-174.

18, 20). She notes – rightly, I would argue – that the text has been dominated by male commentators resulting in the dilution of the pain and violation of the feminine to vindicate a theology of just punishment (i.e., theodicy). This leads her to argue that "an appropriate response to the personification of Zion/Woman in Lamentations is one of resistance to the text and a female solidarity" with ancient, battered women.[52]

But she goes a step further than most by rejecting the feminine personification of Jerusalem itself, disparaging the ancient move as a product of patriarchal "masterminds" seeking to justify their own oppressive worldview, making "Zion/Woman the elected victim, the offering given up on their behalf."[53] Guest reads Lamentations as offering a theodicy *carte blanche* at the expense of the feminine, and therefore the final form of the book must be resisted.[54] In my estimation this move ultimately obscures the dialogistic ambiguity of the theological data and casts aside literature that may still be mined for truth without passivity to abuse.

e. Tod Linafelt

In *Surviving Lamentations*, Linafelt explicitly expresses his goal to shift the often obsessive focus by commentators on the man in ch. 3 and prioritize instead the figure of Lady Zion in chs. 1-2. He agrees with Westermann's protest against the denigration of lament spirituality, but finds Westermann to be lacking in recognizing the degree of protest against God in chs. 1-2 (and, I would argue, including ch. 3). Linafelt claims the troubling corollary of an interpretive bias towards ch. 3 is the conclusion that Lamentations' primary function is to provide *reasons* for pain, but instead the book "is more about the

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[52] Guest, *Hiding Behind the Naked Woman*, 427.

[53] Guest, *Hiding Behind the Naked Woman*, 430.

[54] Alice Miller is another voice who protests against the "acceptance" motif in Lamentations and resists the final form ("The Mistreated Child in the Lamentations of Jeremiah," *Breaking Down the Wall of Silence: The Liberating Experience of Facing Painful Truth* [London: Virago, 1991], 114-126). She seeks to write out of solidarity with the abused children in our own day, and finds in the protests of Lamentations rebellion against cruelty, "in the manner of a vital, feeling, and seeing child." She argues that mistreated children often cling to the hope that the abuse they suffer is simply a response to their own guilt, therefore they are only being reprimanded out of love. This delusion, Miller insists, must be resisted when found in the text of Lamentations, for "Jeremiah's consolation...cannot be ours."

expression of suffering than the meaning behind it, more about the vicissitudes of *survival* than the abstractions of sin and guilt, and more about *protest* as a religious posture than capitulation or confession."[55] Lamentations exists as a piece of melancholic literature, underscoring "the impossibility of mourning" in the face of such divine abuse and abandonment, and yet the pressure to resist the deity and demand a response.[56]

Linafelt reads Lamentations from an overt perspective of survival literature and psychological reading strategies. Following Freud, he distinguishes between mourning and melancholia. The former is an ultimately positive process that brings resolution to suffering, whereas melancholia is to be considered "a pathological disposition,"[57] indeed, the failure of mourning. His analysis on Lam 1-2 leads him to conclude that the aim of these first two poems is not to offer an explanation for suffering, or even a way out of it (*contra* the common interpretations of ch. 3, which I also dispute). Rather, he pursues to expand Westermann's brief comment: "The issue in this text is one of survival as such."[58] In place of the theological categories of guilt or hope, it is the concern for survival that operates as "a sort of hermeneutical key to the poetry of chapters 1 and 2."[59] The function of survival literature is to exist as a memorial to the depth of suffering, intended to draw the reader into a place of compassion and empathy with the sufferers. Paradoxically, this commemoration both heightens the fact of loss as well as the persistent power of life. The bulk of Linafelt's book explores the "afterlife" of Lamentations through a study of how Jewish readers in different periods have sought to "survive" their assault by Lamentations by seeking comfort outside the boundaries of the text.

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[55] Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 4.

[56] Tod Linafelt, "The Impossibility of Mourning: Lamentations after the Holocaust," in Linafelt and Beal, *God in the Fray*, 279-289.

[57] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (trans. James Strachey *et al.*; London: Hogarth, 1957) 14:243. Cited in Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 141.

[58] Westermann, *Lamentations*, 81.

[59] Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 18.

5. *Integrated Approaches*

I have placed the following four scholars – F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, Robin Parry, Paul House, and Heath Thomas – under the category of "integrated approaches," as all four do a particularly good job of integrating historical-critical, literary, ideological, and theological methodologies when dealing with Lamentations.

a. *F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp*

After extensive analysis of the provenance and poetic characteristics of Lamentations,[60] Dobbs-Allsopp treats the theology of the book as an intentionally structured whole that deals primarily with the relationship between (orthodox) theology and justice. The book, he insists, should actually be read *theologically* as a synchronic entity. As already noted, through extensive comparative generic analysis between Lamentations and ANE city-laments, Dobbs-Allsopp concludes that Lamentations fits not only this ancient context but indicates generic resemblance to ANE city-laments. Nonetheless, given the expectations that this genre would raise for a *return* of the deity, the absence of this resolution in Lamentations signals one of the important departures from the city-lament form. Among other reasons, Dobbs-Allsopp argues that in light of these realities the theology of Lamentations evinces a notably *tragic* character.[61] So, while Lamentations contains acknowledgments of sin, these are heavily nuanced by the book's complaints that the punishment far exceeds her crimes, constituting abuse (*contra*, e.g., Gottwald).[62] Against previous attempts to systematize the book's message, "the theology of Lamentations is occasional, pluralistic, equivocating, and fragmentary."[63] Though the poetry reaches points of clarity, responsiveness, and hope, these are only

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[60] Dobbs-Allsopp, "Linguistic Evidence," 1-36; *idem*, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion, passim*; *idem*, *Lamentations, passim*.

[61] See esp. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology."

[62] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 25-46.

[63] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 25.

"momentary stays against confusion": "No sooner are they reaches than the poetry moves on again, pulled by the tug of the enjambing syntax or by the ever onward march of the alphabet."[64]

Dobbs-Allsopp's framing of the relationship between theology and justice in the book is specifically nuanced in terms of polarized perspectives between "theodicy" and "antitheodicy."[65] Without denying the theodic witness in the Bible (or Lamentations),[66] he accents antitheodic speech in Lamentations, which acts as "an assertion of pain's uselessness and malignancy that is unforgiveable wherever and whenever encountered."[67] But, "to read Lamentations as theodicy is finally to misread Lamentations."[68] The book moves from questioning the justice of God to actual criminal indictment of God.[69]

Though rarely using the vocabulary of dialogism, Dobbs-Allsopp nonetheless construes the text of Lamentations in similar ways to O'Connor, Mandolfo, and Boase. Far from 3:21-39 constituting the theological center or "high point" of the book, he argues that the positive theology is severely undercut by the material that follows, an important point I embrace as crucial. *Contra* the more overtly deconstructionist approaches found in writings like Seidman's, Dobbs-Allsopp makes the provocative claim that, "though potentially blasphemous, the bite of antitheodicy's sting depends fundamentally on a persistent and stubborn love for God,"[70] that the individual's or community's anger may be "*faithfully* expressed before Yahweh."[71] The book of Lamentations, then, functions as a safe space for theological catharsis, where "orthodoxy" may be duly investigated in the light of lived experience.

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[64] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 27.

[65] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 29.

[66] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 28.

[67] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 35.

[68] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 29.

[69] Heath Thomas observes that, if Dobbs-Allsopp is correct in his assessment of the *legal* aspect of antitheodicy in Lamentations, "then this legal function against Yhwh would represent a novum in Israelite theology, much less Israelite literature. This suggestion of the legal aspect of anti-theodicy in Lamentations perhaps goes too far" (*Poetry and Theology*, 46).

[70] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 30.

[71] Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology," 53 (his italics).

b. Robin Parry

Robin Parry's recent commentary on Lamentations – a contribution to the *Two Horizons* series – reads the book from an overtly confessional Christian perspective, particularly attempting to connect the book's theology to the OT/NT canonical and covenantal framework.[72] This partly results in insisting that the theology of the book as a whole can be treated in a coherent way (an insistence with which I agree), to be moderated by the Christian rule of faith and canonical witness (with which I hold reservations). Parry parts ways with most contemporary scholarship in returning to an emphasis on the hope-filled sections of Lam 3, arguing that the book's theology of hope is secured precisely by the covenant itself. "Crucial to understanding the hope implicit in Lamentations is the appreciation that *the fire of divine punishment falls within a covenant relationship and does not mean the end of that relationship*."[73] Ultimately, he sees 3:31-33 as "a central theological insight of the book,"[74] and one of Parry's larger arguments is that "there is a general, albeit cautious, movement in the direction of hope. I propose that chs. 4 and 5 do not unweave the hope of ch. 3."[75]

c. Paul House

Paul House offers a very different interpretation of the book's theology by arguing that recent interpretive trends strongly overstate the presence of protest theology (or what I am terming "antitheodicy"). He perceives Lamentations' poems as consistently accepting the guilty of the people and the need for confession and penitence. The present suffering is just punishment for the people's covenant infidelity. When we hear the cries of pain and calls for deliverance, we are not witnessing protests against divine injustice but confirmation "that those who suffer because of their own sins may cry out to God as readily as innocent sufferers do."[76]

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[72] Parry, *Lamentations*, 28-33.

[73] Parry, *Lamentations*, 31 (his italics).

[74] Parry, *Lamentations*, 33.

[75] Parry, *Lamentations*, 18.

[76] House, *Lamentations*, 320.

House centers the theology of Lamentations around four interrelated themes: (i) *God, the people of God, and their suffering*; (ii) *God and Jerusalem/Zion*; (iii) *God and the nations*; and (iv) *God and Prayer.* His appraisal of the theological message is distinctive in its optimism while nonetheless underscoring the severity of divine judgment. In Lamentations

> the Lord is righteous, just, powerful, kind, severe, compassionate, faithful, and willing to hear and answer prayer. There is no question that the Lord is a thorough, severe, and unstinting judge of thorough, ingrained, consistent sin. At the same time, it is plain that these characteristics are not the primary facets of God's nature. For these are not constant actions derived from that character. God's lovingkindness, faithfulness, and ruling power are the Lord's ongoing traits, so the covenant people have hope for the future.[77]

He goes so far as to assert that the main theological takeaway from Lamentations is that Yahweh is a God of "outrageous grace," lavishing it on those who do not deserve it but justly punishing those who do.[78] Much of House's argumentation rests on a traditional reading of Lam 3:22-39. Critiquing O'Connor and Mandolfo's protest theology, he asserts, "The question is what the text yields, not which type of God/god today's audience wants, and the text offers a balanced view of YHWH that emphasizes justice for the wicked alongside the possibility of grace for the wicked and hope for the faithful. [...] Only a resolute God could punish one so beloved after delaying judgment so long, and only a forgiving God could take such a spouse back again."[79]

He emphatically denies that Lamentations anywhere presents Jerusalem's affliction as unjust, and even feels wary of reapplying the text to contemporary situations unless (seems to be the suggestion) it were one of merited divine punishment. In the essay subsequent to his commentary, House concludes, "The truly outrageous nature of YHWH's patient mercy and unwillingness to judge will sustain those who wait for faithfulness each morning. It will sustain those who wait with them. It will thereby aid a Biblical understanding of theodicy, expressing pain, and protesting suffering *without diminishing God's character*."[80]

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[77] House, *Lamentations*, 329.

[78] See House, "Outrageous Demonstrations of Grace," 26-52.

[79] House, "Outrageous Demonstrations of Grace," 37, 48.

[80] House, "Outrageous Demonstrations of Grace," 51 (emphasis added).

d. Heath Thomas

Thomas's recent monograph is the first to be grounded upon the theories of Italian semiotician Umberto Eco.[81] Quite similar in some ways to the Bakhtinian analyses of Boase and Mandolfo, Thomas argues that Lamentations represents a distinctively "open" text, one that offers a number of interpretive avenues for readers:

> The theology of the book varies, but this is part of the function of the poems. The poetry is not designed to teach a particular perspective as much as it is designed to bring the reader on an interpretative journey through its contents, and as he or she progresses, to engage the relationships between sin, God, self, Zion, pain, enemies, suffering, redemption and even an end of the punishment. In the process, the model reader faces an "ideal insomnia" in deciding how to understand these relationships in the poems.[82]

He suggests that a likely explanation for this quality of openness is "the fragmentation and uncertainty" which hovered over the Judahite population during exile.[83]

Thomas insists the text may be read as an intentionally structured whole, consisting of interdialogic material both in and between the poems. He emphasizes the aesthetics of the poetic text in this way, and categorizes the prevalence of repetition in two main categories with two subcategories each: (i) Intensification – (a) to emphasize suffering, and (b) to emphasize judgment; (ii) Combination – (a) to construct interpretive depth; and (b) to refocus previously held understandings.[84] Furthermore, canonical dialogue is explored and suggested as an intentional aspect of Lamentations' final form. Given the book's "open" quality, the theology of each poem may hypothetically stand on its own. Every chapter offers a distinctive reaction to the crisis, dialoguing with other chapters and other canonical material. When one reads straight through, the "model reader" is one who is led to continue the dialogic conversation. "The use of cultural data present to Lamentations...[is] significant, and drives the reader 'outward' into the encyclopaedia to construct the intention of the work."[85] Allusion, repetition, metaphor, personae, and imagery are all examined as

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[81] For Thomas's methodological appropriation of Eco's semiotics, see *Poetry and Theology*, 50-73.

[82] Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*, 246.

[83] Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*, 247.

[84] Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*, 131-132, 164-165, 205-207, 238-240.

[85] Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*, 244-245.

effective poetic tools to drive the reader "forward," "outward," and "inward." The text of Lamentations is "aesthetic" in that it "manipulates language so that semantic density and poetic quality" evince visceral reactions from the reader in order to "stimulate reactions and open horizons" of interpretation.[86] And even in the midst of such poetic openness, such uncomfortable theological diversity, a tacit understanding of God as a potent, effective agent lingers. Though God never speaks, every poet does address God, implying the presence of hope, however fragile. Thomas's understanding of textual "openness" leads him to assert that the diverse theological options presented in Lamentations are equally viable for readers.

6. *Methodology: Mikhail Bakhtin*

a. Mikhail Bakhtin: Dialogism, Polyphony, Double Voicing, and "Open" Texts

In Brueggemann's magisterial *Theology of the Old Testament*, he notes that the discourse of the Hebrew Bible "is not at all vexed about juxtaposing texts that explicitly contradict each other," and the theology found therein is "characteristically dialectical and dialogical." He then suggests in a footnote: "I have no doubt that the work of Mikhail Bakhtin will be crucial for future work in this direction in Old Testament study."[87] His intuition has proved true as a bevy of works in Biblical studies have been produced that deal with Bakhtin's work in one way or another.[88]

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[86] Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*, 59.

[87] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 82, 83n57.

[88] E.g., Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction* (SemSt, 38; Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 2000); Walter L. Reed, *Dialogues of the Word: The Bible as Literature According to Bakhtin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980); *idem, Samuel and the Deuteronomist* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989); Kenneth Craig, *Reading Esther: A Case for the Literary Carnivalesque* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995); Ilana Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); C. A. Newsom, *The Book of Job*; *eadem*, "The Book of Job as Polyphonic Text," *JSOT* 97 (2002): 87-108; *eadem*, "Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth," *JR* 76 (1996): 290-306; Nāsili Vaka'uta, "Relocating the Boundaries: An Alternative for Biblical Interpretation," *PJT* 20 (1998): 40-53; C. W. Miller, "Reading Voices: Personification, Dialogism and the Reader of Lamentations 1," *BibInt* 9 (2001): 393-408; P. Tull Willey, *Remember the Former Things*; *eadem*, "Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality," in S. L. McKenzie and S.

I have been deeply influenced by the appropriation of Bakhtin's theories in the projects of Boase and Mandolfo, and this has led me to explore how the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) might illuminate my own work on Lamentations.[89] Bakhtin was a Russian philosopher and literary critic whose work was swallowed by obscurity due to the restrictions of the Soviet Union before *Glasnost*. But since the 1970s his writings have gained an increasingly influential hearing among Western scholars. The aspects of Bakhtin's work upon which I will draw deal mainly with his argument that texts speak beautifully when they speak with many voices (polyvalence) rather than with one voice (monologism). The interaction of the many (often divergent) voices in a work is "dialogism." Yet Bakhtin goes even further by drawing a distinction between monologic and dialogic *truth*, a distinction applied not only to the literary novel but also to epistemology.[90]

Monologic truth, says Bakhtin, is grounded in the concept of the "separate thought," a propositional truth or abstraction that may be spoken, understood, and repeated irrespective of the particularities of any given real-life individual.[91] The thought is "separate" in that the content is supposedly independent of the speaker — they are "no-man's-thoughts."[92] Monologic conceptions of truth typify modern scientific thought, and Bakhtin's concern lies in the inevitable progression toward systemization (a concern that heavily drives Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament* as well).

R. Haynes (eds.), *To Each its Own Meaning: Biblical Criticisms and their Application* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 156-180.

[89] There are a large variety of publications by or about Bakhtin, but I will limit myself to the following: Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981); *idem*, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. C. Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (London: Routledge, 1990); G. S. Morson and C. Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Alexander Mihailovic, *Corporeal Words: Mikhail Bakhtin's Theology of Discourse* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997); Ruth Coates, *Christianity in Bakhtin: God and the Exiled Author* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Anton Ugolnik, "An Orthodox Hermeneutic in the West," *SVTQ* 27 (1983): 93-118; Charles Lock, "Carnival and Incarnation: Bakhtin and Orthodox Theology," *JLT* 5 (1991): 68-82; Anthony C. Thiselton, "Different Understanding of *Dialectic, Systems, Polyphony,* and *Canon*: Bakhtin," 134-144 in *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Hilary B. P. Bagshaw, *Religion in the Thought of Mikhail Bakhtin: Reason and Faith* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013).

[90] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 78-100.

[91] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 93.

[92] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 93.

Even if truly dialogical or complex, monologic truth is theoretically capable of being held and spoken by one individual, resulting in the hegemony of unequal power relations. "The [monologic] proposition or system is structured in such a way that even if it is the product of many minds, it is represented as capable of being spoken by a single voice."[93]

In contrast, dialogic truth is enmeshed in the particularity of unique individuals, resists abstract systemization, and requires at least two or more individuals or communities in dialogue. "Truth happens not as an abstract proposition but as a dialogue 'event' among many different people who themselves are products of a complex number of internalized voices which they have assimilated from outside themselves."[94] Dialogic truth is not "a subjective individual-psychological formation with 'permanent resident right' in a person's head; no, the idea is inter-individual and inter-subjective – the realm of its existence is not the individual consciousness but dialogic communion between consciousnesses."[95] True accounts of lived experience reflect this irreducibly dialogical quality, and Bakhtin argued that Dostoevsky's novels such as *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov* epitomize true dialogics by maintaining competing narratorial voices without one achieving hegemony. One of the results of dialogism is Bakhtin's claim that truth is always open, and to use one of his favorite neologisms, "unfinalizable":

> The dialogic nature of consciousness. The dialogic nature of human life itself. The single adequate form for *verbally expressing* authentic human life is the *open-ended dialogue*. Life by its very nature is dialogue. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue, a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium.[96]

There are similarities here with Hans Robert Jauss, who states that "monologue" threatens to silence "the other" by forcing an agenda and conceptual framework of one upon another. Monologue is

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[93] Newsom, "Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth," 292.

[94] Dennis T. Olson, "Biblical Theology as Provisional Monologization: A Dialogue with Childs, Brueggemann and Bakhtin," *BibInt* 6.2 (1998): 174.

[95] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 88; see also, "Discourse in the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 259-422.

[96] Bakhtin, "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book," Appendix 2 in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 293.

"closed discourse," a static system. Jauss even draws attention the dialogic quality of the Hebrew Bible.[97]

These concerns work alongside the language of narrative hermeneutics, where the text is experienced as a *drama*. While discussing types of narratives, Kevin J. Vanhoozer distinguishes between epic narrative – which displays a monological, declarative mode of discourse – and dialogical narrative. In the former, each voice vies for the position of arbiter. "Propositionalist theology at its worst is guilty of *de-dramatizing* Scripture."[98] Dialogical narrative, on the other hand reflects the hermeneutical realities of drama as lived experience.

A second concept of Bakhtin's that is useful for examining the theology of Lamentations builds upon dialogism, namely, "polyphony." Morson and Emerson describe a polyphonic text as one which contains a "plurality of unmerged voices," a work that mitigates the hegemonic tendencies of monologism which quench genuine dialogue.[99] Important to grasp here is Bakhtin's insistence that when reading a polyphonic text it is not the plot or characterization that is of ultimate importance, but *the dialogue itself*. Polyphony is one of Bakhtin's most frequently misunderstood concepts, as writers tend to assume it is equivalent to a form of relativism. Not at all, as Bakhtin himself made clear: "The polyphonic approach has nothing in common with relativism. [...] Relativism and dogmatism equally exclude [...] authentic dialogue by making it unnecessary (relativism) or impossible (dogmatism)."[100] It is more the case that polyphony steers a *via media* between the extremes of relativism and dogmatism, and for this reason it can truly be termed a dialogue.

Yet another related Bakhtinian concept is that of "double-voicing." In defining double-voiced discourse, he suggests that "it is directed both toward the referential object of speech [...] and toward *another's discourse*, towards *someone else's speech*."[101] That is, double-voiced discourse occurs when an

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[97] Hans Robert Jauss, *Question and Answer: Forms of Dialogic Understanding*, trans. M. Hays (Theological History of Literature, 68; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 51-94.

[98] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 87 (his italics). See also Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 62-80.

[99] Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 236.

[100] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 232-233.

[101] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 185 (his italics).

author intentionally makes use "of someone else's discourse for his own purposes by inserting a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own."[102] A further distinction is to identify "passive" or "active" double-voicing. This will prove quite important in analyzing the paraenesis of 3:25-39, and as such warrants further explanation. C. W. Miller helpfully defines the distinction between active and passive double-voicing:

> If someone else's speech, that is the actual words spoken, remains outside of the utterance, but still strongly effects the content and structure of the discourse, then it is said to be active double-voiced discourse. It is active, because "the other's words actively influence the author's speech, forcing it to alter itself accordingly under their influence and initiative." On the other hand, if someone else's speech is reproduced in an utterance, but given an intention different than it was meant to have originally, Bakhtin terms this passive double-voiced discourse. [...] It is important to note that both types are directed towards another's speech – that is what makes them double-voiced. They are distinguished, however, by whether or not the actual words of the other are reproduced – if they are not, it is active; if they are, it is passive.[103]

The intention, then, is for the reader to interact with both voices. Significantly for the present study, it will be my contention that the stereotypical theodic discourse in 3:22-42a constitutes *passive* double-voicing, where this *word of the other* (viz., *not* the גבר) is "given an intention different than it was meant to have originally." This intention is disclosed for the reader after the fact, but this in no way diminishes its role as passive double-voicing.

As for applying these theories to Biblical scholarship, Bakhtin also contemplates how one should read ancient texts or foreign cultures: "There exists a very strong, but one-sided and thus untrustworthy, idea that in order better to understand a foreign culture, one must enter into it, forgetting one's own, and view the world [entirely] through the eyes of this foreign culture." This may be helpful as a provisional first step, but is ultimately inadequate, for dialogism occurs when the foreigner brings to the encounter the particularities of experience and culture. "One's own formative traditions are an important contribution to be carried into the full dialogical engagement with an ancient or foreign text."[104] Bakhtin even conceived of Christ's incarnation as truly dialogical in

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[102] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 189.
[103] Miller, "Reading Voices," 395-396.
[104] Olson, "Biblical Theology as Provisional Monologization," 175.

character, as "the One who performed a live entering into the world without ever losing his divine outsideness."[105]

One immediately notices a similarity to discussions of the hermeneutic "death of the author," Derridean deconstructionism, and different forms of nonfoundationalism and postfoundationalism.[106] Efforts in Biblical theology have long been driven by claims of monologic truth, seeking to "disentangle the various voices so that one could identify the different individual monologic voices."[107] Yet the discourse of Biblical theology has begun to shift in a dialogical direction as it increasingly recognizes the canonical collection as characteristically dialogic, polyphonic, and double-voiced. Scholars continue to disagree whether Bakhtin's claims concerning the dialogic nature of literature may be transferred over to epistemology, yet the general trend among OT scholarship is increasingly suspicious of broad, systematic explanatory schemata. Still, Bakhtin makes an important caveat in his discussions on the "unfinalizability" of texts and truth, arguing that "provisional monologizations" are useful and necessary as first steps in an ongoing dialogue. The important thing is to maintain an open rather than closed posture, where subsequent dialogue is never refused under the guise of monologic claims to absolute truth. Bakhtin explicitly rejects epistemological relativism, for such a move merely leaves us with monologizations *ad infinitum*. Again, Morson and Emerson assist in explaining that, for Bakhtin, "at least single monologizations – that is dogmatic statements – take a stand, and therefore may be transcended. Pure relativism leaves us in a world where even this transcendence is impossible, and where responsibility in any meaningful sense is absent."[108]

For my own part, this study enters into intentional dialogue first with the theodic traditions found expressed in Lamentations, and second those of contemporary theology. My interest is not to trace in

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[105] Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 61.

[106] Students of hermeneutics should immediately perceive affinities between Bakhtin and Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. See especially Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 19-30, 369-379. For a creative and lucid survey of the recent debates, see Randal Rauser, *Theology in Search of Foundations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[107] Newsom, "Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth," 293.

[108] Morson and Emerson, *Creation of a Prosaics*, 59.

detail the specific allusions to Deuteronomistic, prophetic, and Wisdom traditions, but rather emphasize the interdialogic quality of the גבר's discourse throughout Lam 3 with.

7. *Conclusion*

This survey has highlighted a variety of ways we may approach the poems of Lamentations. Historical analyses are helpful to an extent, but we must be careful not to overstate how much Deuteronomistic or Zion theologies determine Lamentations' theology, though dialogue with these traditions permeates the poems. As noted, the primary worldviews that come under critique in the theodicy of Lamentations 3 are the Deuteronomistic, Prophetic, and Wisdom traditions. Older generations of scholarship were predisposed to fragmentation, but recent trends are correct to approach the book as an intentionally constructed literary whole. The discrepancy between theological portraits throughout Lamentations remains tenuous ground on which to claim multiple authorship or arbitrary redaction. While it is certainly the case that the text has a complicated history, and while we may partially reconstruct these processes, the available evidence is far too scant to prefer this to the book's final form.

But while this final form is preferred in this study, one should still exercise caution in this regard. The literary structures offered by those like Shea or Renkema are helpful to an extent but are ultimately guilty of overdetermination. Aesthetic beauty does not necessarily equal pragmatic force, and we should be sober when drawing meaning from literary structure. I will also suggest the presence of possible canonical dialogue in certain sections of the text. While my primary concern will be dialogism within Lamentations itself, brief reference to other bodies of material will also be made. Debates continue as to whether such intrabiblical exegesis and dialogue is so simply deduced,[109] and I

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[109] Michael Fishbane's seminal work, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), is still the standard on this question. See also E. van Wolde, "Trendy Intertextuality?" in S. Draisma (ed.), *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings: Essays in Honour of Bas van Iersel* (Kampen: Kok, 1989), 43-49; Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); T. R. Hatina, "Intertextuality and Historical Criticism in New Testament Studies: Is There a Relationship," *BibInt* 7.1 (1999): 28–43; Patricia K. Tull, "Intertextuality and the Hebrew Scriptures," *CurBS* 8.1 (2000): 59–90; Geoffrey D. Miller, "Intertextuality in Old Testament Research," *CBR* 9.3 (2011): 283–309; Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood,

offer such suggestions cautiously. But those who are compelled by Brevard Childs's "canonical method" will of course be more open to these possible canonical dialogues.

It is clear that recent trends in Lamentations research have tended toward the theological and ideological. Critical approaches seeking to destabilize an ostensibly abusive hegemony of interpretive bias have shifted the focus away from Lam 3 to chs. 1-2. The privilege lately has been given to the voice of Daughter Zion, and rightly so in my opinion. I strongly agree with the claims that certain strands of theology within Lamentations are dangerous and ultimately abusive, and therefore deserve critique. For the most part in this study, I do not adopt a particular ideological stance (e.g., feminist, post-colonialist, etc.) besides nonviolence, but my theological sensibilities have been heavily influenced by such approaches. Otherwise, I place myself within the trajectory of recent "integrated" approaches. Nonetheless, in this particular work I privilege the literary criticism of Mikhail Bakhtin, with a close eye to the theological implications for a given interpretation. I work with the conviction that the Biblical texts exert considerable influence over the human imagination worldwide, and this for good or ill. I will attempt to decipher authorial intent (of the final form) in my exegesis while remaining conscious of the reality of dialogism: this text persists into the present moment and insists on dialogue with contemporary persons in contemporary situations. There is a place where ancient authorial intent and contemporary context and imagination meet, and it is in this interpretative space that I hope to offer my reading to critique the damaging effects of traditional theodicy and give voice to antitheodicy.

The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011); J. Barton, "Déjà Lu: Intertextuality, Method or Theory?" in K. Dell and W. Kynes (eds.), *Reading Job Intertextually*, (LHB/OTS, 574; London / New York: T & T Clark, 2013), 1-18.

Chapter 3

(Anti)Theodicy in Lamentations 3: A New Reading

The biblical protest against Jhwh, who acts in contradiction to his own ethical standards, is not rooted in a cultural disapproval of a violent God, but in a hope to experience his benevolence again. The sapiential reflection of the geber in the center of Book of Lamentations [...] does not present the solution to the problem of divine negativity, but the internal motivation to protest against it.

(ULRICH BERGES)[1]

1. *Translation of 3:1-66*

vv. 1-3: א

I am the man who has seen affliction from the rod of his fury.	אני הגבר ראה עני בשבט עברתו
It was me he drove away and forced to walk in darkness and not light.	אותי נהג וילך חשך אור ולא
Surely against me he turned his hand again and again,[2] all day long.	אך בי ישב יהפך ידו כל היום

vv. 4-6: ב

He consumed my flesh and skin; he shattered my bones.	בלה בשרי ועורי שבר עצמותי
He besieged me and surrounded me with poison and hardship.	בנה עלי ויקף ראש ותלאה
He made me dwell in dark places like those long dead.	במחשכים הושיבני כמתי עולם

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[1] Ulrich Berges, "The Violence of God in the Book of Lamentations," in P. Chatelion Counet and Ulrich Berges (eds.), *One Text, a Thousand Methods: Studies in Memory of Sjef van Tilborg* (BIS, 71; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 41-42.

[2] The combination of שוב and הפך indicates a verbal hendiadys, a common poetic feature throughout Lamentations.

vv. 7-9: ג

> He walled me up so I cannot get out;
>> he made my shackles heavy.

> Even though I repeatedly cried out for help,
>> he shut out[3] my prayer.

> He walled off my ways with hewn stones;
>> he twisted my paths.

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גדר בעדי ולא אצא הכביד נחשתי

גם כי אזעק ואשוע שתם תפלתי

גדר דרכי בגזית נתיבתי עוה

</div>

vv. 10-12: ד

> A bear lying in ambush...that's what he is to me!
>> – a lion[4] in hidden places.

> He forced me off my ways and tore me to pieces;
>> he made me desolate.

> He bent his bow and set me up
>> for target practice.

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דב ארב הוא לי אריה במסתרים

דרכי סורר ויפשחני שמני שמם

דרך קשתו ויציבני כמטרא לחץ

</div>

vv. 13-15: ה

> He forced into my inmost parts
>> arrows from his quiver.

> I have become a laughingstock to all
>> my people,[5] their mocking-song all day long.

> He has "satisfied" me with bitterness,
>> "sated" me with wormwood.

<div dir="rtl">

הביא בכליותי בני אשפתו

הייתי שחק לכל־עמי נגינתם כל היום

השביעני במרורים הרוני לענה

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vv. 16-18: ו

> He ground my teeth in gravel;
>> he made me cower in the dust.

> My soul was cast away from peace;[6]

<div dir="rtl">

ויגרס בחצץ שני הכפישני באפר

ותזנח משלום נפשי נשיתי טובה

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[3] שתם is a *hapax legomenon* with uncertain meaning. Many MSS. read סתם, "he blocked my prayer." As it stands, it is a Qal perfect from √שתם, "he shut out my prayer" (see *HALOT*).

[4] Though its proper pointing would be אַרְיֵה, the meaning in the MT (אֲרִיה *Kethib*) is clear enough. Some MSS. read the *Qere* אֲרִי.

[5] Peshitta reads עמים ("the peoples/nations"). If one reads with the Peshitta then the man, like Zion, is mocked by the foreign nations (Lam 1:7d, 8b, 17c; 2:15-16). But following the MT and LXX with עמי, we read that the man's own people taunt his suffering at the hand of God. This could serve to underscore notions of the people's sinfulness.

[6] ותזנח could be (a) Niphal imperfect 3f sg (with "my life/soul" as subject); or (b) Qal imperfect 2m sg (with God as subject). Option (b) would be, "You [God] cut my soul/life off from peace." The latter option is given by the MT pointing (וַתִּזְנַח), as opposed to repointing (וַתִּזָּנַח) to make "my life/soul" the subject; both the Vulgate and

I forgot what goodness is.

And I said, "My future[7] is gone, ואמר אבד נצחי ותוחלתי מיהוה
and all that I had waited for from Yahweh."

vv. 19-21: ז

Remember[8] my affliction and my wandering, זכר עניי ומרודי לענה וראש
wormwood and poison!

My soul[9] continually remembers, זכור תזכור ותשוח עלי נפשי
and it cowers over me.[10]

I call all of this to my mind; זאת אשיב אל לבי על כן אוחיל
therefore, I will wait...[11]

vv. 22-24: ח

Yahweh's loving kindnesses are surely[12] חסדי יהוה כי לא תמו כי לא כלו רחמיו
not ended; surely his mercies do not fail.

Peshitta read with the repointing, and I adopt this reading. The MT pointing as Qal imperfect 2m sg seems quite out of place in this extended complaint otherwise devoid of direct addresses to God (except, perhaps, v. 19). LXX reads καὶ ἀπώσατο (from וַיִּזְנַח "and he rejected").

[7] See *HALOT* s.v. I נצח. The term can denote the idea of "glory" or "permanence." Glory is possible but unlikely as it is typically associated with Yahweh (e.g., 1 Sam 15:29; 1 Chr 29:11) rather than humans.

[8] זכר could be (a) Qal imperative m sg or (b) Qal infinitive construct m sg. LXX seems to have read something similar to option (b): Ἐμνήσθην κ.τ.λ., "I remember..." If option (a), it is unclear just *who* is being addressed: his fellow people (the עמי of 3:14) or God. With Peshitta and Vulgate, I read the גבר as addressing God.

[9] This line contains one of the alleged *Tiqqune Sopherim*, where נפשי replaces the supposed original נפשך "your [viz., God's] soul." The poet would then be claiming that God is deeply affected, even moved to compassion, because of the גבר's plight. The entire line would read: "You continually remember and your soul will be concerned over me." Either the *Qere* or *Kethib* is sensible here, but I prefer the *Qere* as it fits better with the rhetorical structure of chapter 3 for which I am arguing. See the exegesis below.

[10] Reading *Kethib* ותשיח as *Qere* ותשוח Qal imperfect 3f sg from √שׁוח/שׁחח (see *HALOT*), "to be bent over/cower." Cf. LXX καταδολεσχήσει, "to chatter (about)," though the entire Lucianic recension reads τακήσεται (from τήκω), "(my soul) will melt away" (so also Vulgate).

[11] Against traditional interpretations, I interpret v. 21 in a much more pessimistic note by reading על־כן as referencing the preceding lines (its usual syntactical convention), and by restraining a tone of hopefulness in translating אוחיל (√יחל); see Ps 42:7 (Eng. = v. 6). So, rather than 3:19-21 constituting a smooth transition into 3:22ff., I read 3:21 as simply concluding the section of individual complaint. The repetition of יחל in 3:24 then answers the dilapidated "waiting" of 3:21. This is opposed to the traditional reading which reads the יחל in 3:21 as reaching proleptically in hope toward 3:22ff. In the Greek tradition, the entire Lucianic recension reads ελπιω επ αυτω (198 = αυτον). See the exegesis below.

[12] Reading asseverative rather than causal כי's along with, e.g., Hillers (*Lamentations*, 115); Salters (*Lamentations*, 225); Thomas F. McDaniel ("Philological Studies in Lamentations, II," *Bib* 49 [1968]: 199-220); and Gordis ("Asseverative Kaph in Hebrew and Ugaritic," *JAOS* 63 [1943]: 176-178).

They are new every morning! Great is your faithfulness!	חדשים לבקרים רבה אמונתך
"Yahweh is my portion," says my soul; therefore, I will wait for him.	חלקי יהוה אמרה נפשי על כן אוחיל לו

vv. 25-27: ט

Yahweh is good to the one who hopes in him, to the soul that seeks him.[13]	טוב יהוה לקוו לנפש תדרשנו
It is good to wait in silence[14] for Yahweh's deliverance.	טוב ויחיל ודומם לתשועת יהוה
It is good for a man to carry a yoke in his youth.	טוב לגבר כי ישׂא על בנעוריו

vv. 28-30: י

Let him sit alone and be silent, for he[15] has laid it upon him.	ישב בדד וידם כי נטל עליו

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[13] The Masoretic pointing signals לקוו (*Kethib*) be read לקויו (*Qere*), "to those who wait for him" (plural participle). LXX and *Tg. Lam.* read plural. I follow the *Kethib* along with Hillers (*Lamentations*, 115). לנפשׁ and תדרשנו suggest לקוו be understood as a singular, observing parallelism.

[14] ויחיל as pointed in the MT is unfamiliar (וְיָחִיל). LXX is καὶ ὑπομενεῖ. We would expect a Hiphil imperfect 3m sg (√יחל), where the *qāmeṣ* under the י is converted to a *ḥōlem* (וְיֹחִיל), making it fit the Hiphil paradigm. I understand it in this way. The ו-conjunctive on ודומם is also unusual. Albrektson emends ויחיל to הֹחִיל, a Hiphil infinitive construct, and then emends the adverb ודומם to וְדֹמֹם, a Qal infinitive construct. Budde offers the least intrusive option: וַיֹּוֹחִילוּ דוֹמָם. So with Budde, "It is good that they hope in silence," or, following Delitzsch and Albrektson, "It is good to wait and to be silent for the salvation of the Lord." Gordis and Haller follow a similar route. See Albrektson, *Studies in the Text*, 146-148 for a discussion. Gottlieb contends that the text may remain as it stands, and our translational problems arise from assuming ויחיל ודומם is the subject of a nominal clause introduced by טוב (viz., "Good is..."). Instead, he argues, we should take טוב to be the predicate of Yahweh as in 3:25. We can then read the ויחיל as an asyndetic circumstantial clause: "[Yahweh] is good when one waits in silence..." Though they do not use the terminology, one could see this approach as reading vv. 25-26 as enjambed. This is promising, but Gottlieb still fails to account for the unusual and unfamiliar וְיָחִיל. Renkema builds on Gottlieb's suggestions by reading טוב as the predicate of Yahweh, but points the clause as יוֹחִיל וְדוּמָם. It should be read, he argues, as a jussive and interpreted as a circumstantial clause with an undetermined subject. וְדוּמָם should be read adverbially, and the ו as explicative (GKC §141e, §142d, §144d). Renkema thus translates: "Good is he. May one quietly wait for YHWH's help." However one renders the syntax the basic sense of the line remains the same.

[15] With most commentators, taking the "he" as Yahweh. This is the most natural assumption, especially given v. 31, which seems to confirm Yahweh's agency. "The one who strikes him" (למכהו), then, could most naturally be

Let him put his mouth in the dust;   יתן בעפר פיהו אולי יש תקוה
     perhaps there is hope.

Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him;   יתן למכהו לחי ישבע בחרפה
     let him be satisfied with scorn.

vv. 31-33: כ

Surely Adonai will not reject   כי לא יזנח לעולם אדני
     [us] forever.[16]

Surely if he torments, then he will have compassion   כי אם הוגה ורחם כרב חסדו
     in measure with his abundant loving-kindness.

Surely abusing and tormenting persons...   כי לא ענה מלבו ויגה בני איש
     these are against his very nature![17]

vv. 34-36: ל

Crushing underfoot   לדכא תחת רגליו כל אסירי ארץ
     all the prisoners of [the] land...

Perverting a man's justice   להטות משפט גבר נגד פני עליון
     before the presence of the Most High...

Subverting a person in his lawsuit...   לעות אדם בריבו אדני לא ראה
     doesn't Adonai see all this?![18]

vv. 37-39: מ

Who spoke that this should come to pass?   מי זה אמר ותהי אדני לא צוה
     Adonai did not command it!

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read as Yahweh. Cf. LXX, Peshitta, and *Tg. Lam.*, who all take the subject of נטל to be the suffering man and not Yahweh: "...when such a one bears the yoke."

[16] The second stitch is so short (with אדני alone) that it is assumed to be incomplete, possibly corrupt. I have supplied a possible object of rejection, "us." Cf. *BHS* critical apparatus. O'Connor (*Lamentations*, 49) maintains the shortness of the line as original and emphatic in its brevity.

[17] The poet here employs the striking metaphor of God's "heart." Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Kara gloss the phrase with מרצונו "from his will," and Rashi goes on to say that affliction comes due to the presence of iniquity. Cf. NET: "For he is not predisposed to afflict or grieve people." I have chosen to render the phrase לא מלבו as, "against his nature." See the commentary below for details. Cf. LXX, which reads ענה from √ענה I, "to answer/respond": ὅτι οὐκ ἀπεκρίθη ἀπὸ καρδίας αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐταπείνωσεν υἱοὺς ἀνδρός. In the Greek tradition, *L'*, Tht., Ambr., and PsCypr. correct the mistaken ἀπεκρίθη (with ἀπώσατο later in the verse for Heb. ויגה where LXX has ἐταπείνωσεν): εταπειωνσεν εξ ολης της (>Tht.ᴾ) καρδιας αυτου ουδε απωσατο.

[18] Cf. LXX Lam 3:36b: κύριος οὐκ εἶπεν. The Hexaplaric and Lucianic recensions have κύριος οὐκ εἶδεν. Curiously in the MT, the liturgical ס beginning at Lam 1:1 stretches until a new one occurs here at the end of 3:36, dividing Lamentations into two reading cycles: Lam 1:1-3:36 and 3:37-5:22.

From the mouth of the Most High does not come evil but good!	מפי עליון לא תצא הרעות והטוב
Why then should a man complain against the Living One when the yoke of his sin-fate overwhelms?[21]	מה יתאונן[20] אדם חי גבר על חטאו[19]

Alternative 3:39
What then should a survivor complain about?
Each man about his sin[-fate]!
Or
Why then should a man complain against the Living One?
Let him prevail over his sin-fate![22]

vv. 40-42: נ

Let us examine and explore our ways, and let us return to Yahweh!	נחפשׂה דרכינו ונחקרה ונשׁובה עד יהוה
Let us lift up our heart along with our hands to God in the heavens.	נשׂא לבבנו אל כפים אל אל בשׁמים
We transgressed and were rebellious... ...but *You!* You have not forgiven!	נחנו פשׁענו ומרינו אתה לא סלחת

vv. 43-45: ס

You have smothered [us][23] in anger and pursued us; you slaughtered without mercy.	סכתה באף ותרדפנו הרגת לא חמלת
You have covered yourself in a cloud so prayer cannot pass through.	סכותה בענן לך מעבור תפלה
You have made us filth and refuse in the midst of the peoples.	סחי ומאוס תשׂימנו בקרב העמים

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[19] Following *Kethib* חֶטְאוֹ (*Qere* = חֲטָאָיו).

[20] יִתְאוֹנֵן is from √אנן ("complain") in the Hithpoel. The Hithpoel is the reflexive form of the Poel, a rare stem that is thought to be the Piel for geminate verbs. Its form should not be confused with the similar Hithpolel, which is in turn the reflexive stem of Polel (the Piel for hollow verbs). The Hithpoel corresponds to the Hithpael in meaning. An Aramaicized version of the Hithpoel, the Ethpoel, is found once in Ps 76:6 as אֶשְׁתּוֹלְלוּ from √שׁלל (with metathesis), though some group this *hapax* with the Hithpoel. See *IBHS* §23.2.3a-d.

[21] My preferred reading is an emendation of the MT pointing. Cj. txt em.: מַה־יִּתְאוֹנֵן אָדָם חָי גֶּבֶר עַל חֶטְאוֹ. I take גֶּבֶר עַל חֶטְאוֹ as an asyndetic circumstantial clause: "...when the yoke of his sin-fate overwhelms." See the exegesis below.

[22] Cj. txt em. positing haplography after חִי: מַה־יִּתְאוֹנֵן אָדָם חָי יִגְבַּר עַל חֶטְאוֹ (cf. Lam 1:16c).

[23] No object is supplied. The basic sense can be maintained whether one chooses the object as "us" or "yourself." The latter should be preferred, for rendering סכתה as a reflexive ("You covered *yourself*") is contrary to the Qal usage of the verb. Cf. *Tg. Lam.*: "You have overshadowed us in anger and have pursued us in exile..."

vv. 46-48: פ

All of our enemies opened their mouths
  against us.

פצו עלינו פיהם כל איבינו

Terror and ruin have come to us,
  devastation and destruction.

פחד ופחת היה לנו השאת והשבר

My eyes flow with streams of water over the
  destruction of the daughter of my people.

פלגי מים תרד עיני על שבר בת עמי

vv. 49-51: ע

My eyes pour down [tears] and will not stop.
  There is no relief

עיני נגרה ולא תדמה מאין הפגות

until Yahweh looks down and sees
  from the heavens.

עד ישקיף וירא יהוה משמים

My eyes afflict my soul because of
  all the daughters of my city.

עיני עוללה לנפשי מכל בנות עירי

vv. 52-54: צ

Without cause my enemies hunted me down
  like a bird.

צוד צדוני כצפור איבי חנם

They silenced my life in the pit
  and threw stones at me.

צמתו בבור חיי וידו אבן בי

Waters flowed over my head;
  I thought, "I am finished..."

צפו מים על ראשי אמרתי נגזרתי

vv. 55-57: ק

I call on your name, Yahweh,
  from the deepest pit:

קראתי שמך יהוה מבור תחתיות

Hear my voice;[24] don't shut your ear to
  my need for relief, to my call for help![25]

קולי שמעת אל תעלם אזנך לרוחתי לשועתי

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[24] The perfect verbs stretching from 3:56-66 are syntactically challenging. The main interpretive challenge is whether to understand the verbs as simple past perfects or precative perfects. If the former, then the speaker is recounting past deeds of deliverance by Yahweh. If the latter, the speaker expresses a desire or request to Yahweh from a present experience of distress. I translate the verbs as precative perfects, following Provan, Thomas, and others. For precative perfects, see Provan, *Lamentations*, 105-109; *idem*, "Past, Present and Future in Lamentations III 52-66: The Case for a Precative Perfect Re-examined," *VT* 41 (1991): 164-175. See the exegesis below and *IBHS* §30.5.4c-d.

[25] תילרוח is very rare, רוחה occurring only here and Exod 8:11. The rarity of the phrase possibly reveals the intention of לשועתי as an editorial gloss meant to clarify לרוחתי, and this would explain the unusual length of the line as well. Hillers notes a similar petition from a Palmyrene Aramaic inscription: "they called on him in

Draw near on the day that I call you;	קרבת ביום אקראך אמרת אל תירא
say [to me], "Do not fear"!	

vv. 58-60: ר

Plead my soul's lawsuit, Adonai!	רבת אדני ריבי נפשי גאלת חיי
Redeem my life!	
Look at my oppression, Yahweh!	ראיתה יהוה עותתי שפטה משפטי
Judge my case!	
Look at all of their vengefulness,	ראיתה כל נקמתם כל מחשבתם לי
all of their plots for me!	

vv. 61-63: ש

Hear their scorn, Yahweh,	שמעת חרפתם יהוה כל מחשבתם עלי
and all their plots against me;	
the lips of those who rise against me	שפתי קמי והגיונם עלי כל היום
and their murmuring against me all day long!	
In their sitting and their rising – look! –	שבתם וקימתם הביטה אני מנגינתם
I am the object of their mocking-song.	

vv. 64-66: ת

Return[26] retribution to them, Yahweh,	תשיב להם גמול יהוה כמעשה ידיהם
according to the work of their hands!	
Give them hardness of heart;	תתן להם מגנת לב תאלתך להם
put your curse on them!	
Pursue them in anger and destroy them	תרדף באף ותשמידם מתחת שמי יהוה
from under the heavens of Yahweh!	

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distress and he answered them with relief for them [בְרוח לוֹ] (Hillers, *Lamentations*, 118). While the appeal for "relief" (רוחה) breaks with Biblical idiomatic convention, it still retains acceptable sense and clearly derives from a shared lexical stock. Rudolph translates with the sense of "breath" from √רוח so that the poet calls upon Yahweh to not shut his ear "damit ich Luft bekomme" (*Die Klagelieder*, 229). Provan emphasizes the same root and renders the term as "gasping" (*Lamentations*, 107). *BHS* suggests deleting one phrase. LXX has εἰς τὴν δέησίν μου, "to my prayer" in v. 56, and εἰς τὴν βοήθειάν, "to my help" beginning v. 57, a strange displacement likely due to transmission error.

[26] Though the verbs in 3:64-66 are all imperfects, contextually they could be functioning as imperatives. This is how most contemporary commentators read them. See *IBHS* §31.5b.

2. *The Structure of Lamentations 3*

Before proceeding to detailed interaction of sections pertinent to my argument, it is helpful to try and delineate the basic structure of Lamentations 3. This is no easy task, and the sheer variety of suggested options only serves to show the deep ambiguity surrounding this section. There is little consensus on the structure of chapter 3, yet these decisions are crucial to the subsequent work of interpretation. 3:34-39 and 3:55-66 constitute the bulk of interpretive difficulty, and my exegesis will reflect this. Presently, I will provide what I see to be the general outline of Lamentations 3:

a. The Suffering and Despair of the גבר (3:1-18)
b. The Resignation of the גבר (3:19-21)
c. The גבר's Transition to Theodicy (3:22-33)
1. 3:22-24 The גבר's affirmation of trust in Yahweh
2. 3:25-30 How a sufferer should posture oneself before Yahweh
3. 3:31-33 The reason one can trust: abuse contradicts Yahweh's nature
d. The Dissolution of the גבר's Theodicy (3:34-42a)
1. 3:34-36 Yahweh sees the abuse of the sufferers
2. 3:37-39 Yahweh is not the source of this evil, therefore do not complain against the "Living One/God" when sin-fate overwhelms
3. 3:40-42a The גבר's newfound confidence in Yahweh's goodness leads to a call for corporate repentance, imagining sin-induced consequences apart from divine punishment, and accepting human responsibility for the present evil
e. The גבר Loses Theodic Confidence and Leads a Lament/Complaint (3:42b-54)
1. 3:42b-47 Anger overcomes the גבר's confidence, theodicy fully dissolved, leading to corporate lament led by the גבר
2. 3:48-51 The גבר weeps at the suffering of his city
3. 3:52-54 The גבר recalls more persecution
f. The גבר Prays for Deliverance, and Calls for Vengeance (3:52-66)
1. 3:55-63 The גבר pleads for Yahweh's deliverance
2. 3:64-66 The גבר calls for Yahweh's to punish his enemies

Exegesis & Commentary

a. The Suffering and Despair of the גבר (*3:1-18*)

Lamentations 3 opens with the words, אני הגבר ראה עני "I am the man who has seen affliction..." Several questions immediately present themselves. First, just who is this man? Suggestions have varied in identifying הגבר as an historical individual or a community, ranging from Jeremiah or his persona;[27] a paradigmatic, pious Yahwist;[28] a general Davidic king;[29] or even such specific suggestions as Jehoiakin,[30] Zedekiah,[31] or Seriah the high priest.[32] Heath Thomas counts no less than fourteen proposals for the man's identity, and the plethora of views on display underscores just how unsure we remain regarding the specific identity of the speaker(s) in Lam 3.[33] In the end, the גבר undoubtedly has affinities with a man, the speaker/observer in Lam 1-2, a royal figure, and a pious/paradigmatic sufferer. The elusive quality of his identity lends itself to an "open" interpretation in which the man may move in and out of different roles.

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[27] Hermann Wiesmann, *Die Klagelieder: Übersetzt und erklärt* (Frankfurt am Main: Philosophisch-theologische Hoschule Sankt Georgen, 1954), 44-84; Rudolph, *Klagelieder*, 196-199; Max Löhr, "Threni III und die jeremianische Autorschaft des Buches der Kalgelieder," *ZAW* 24 (1904): 1-16; Gottwald, *Studies in the Book*, 37-46.

[28] Brandscheidt, *Gotteszorn und Menschenleid*, 350; Hillers, *Lamentations*, 122; Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 108-109; Renkema, *Lamentations*, 347-352; Thomas, *Lamentations*, 172-173.

[29] Hans Gottlieb, "Das kultische Leiden des Königs: Zu den Klageliedern 3, 1," *SJOT* 2 (1987): 121-126; Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 108-109.

[30] Norman Porteous, "Jerusalem—Zion: The Growth of a Symbol," in *Verbannung und Heimkehr: Beiträge zur Geschichte und Theologie Israels im 6. und 5. Jahrhundert v. Chr. Wilhelm Rudolph zum 70. Geburtstage* (ed. Arnulf Kuschke; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1961), 235-252.

[31] Magne Sæbø, "Who is 'The Man' in Lamentations 3.1?," in *On the Way to Canon: Creative Tradition History in the Old Testament* (JSOTSup, 191; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 131-142.

[32] Gilbert Brunet, *Les Lamentations contre Jérémie: Réinterprétation des quatre premières Lamentations* (Bibliothèque de L'École des Hautes Études, Section des Sciences Religieuses, 75; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 114-187.

[33] See also Lanahan, "The Speaking Voice," 45-47; O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, 44-46; Erhard Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2 and Lamentations* (FOTL; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 496-497; Ulrich Berges, "'Ich bin der Mann, der Elend sah' (Klgl 3,1): Zionstheologie als Weg aus der Krise," *BZ* 44 (2000): 1-20; Weiser, *Klagelieder*, 228-235; Kraus, *Klagelieder*, 54-55; Provan, *Lamentations*, 80-81; House, *Lamentations*, 404-408; Berlin, *Lamentations*, 84-86.

But why does he speak of himself as "*the* man" as opposed to "*a* man"? It is possible that the poet is playing on the intended audience's familiarity with "the man" among their community, but this should not be pressed too far. Dobbs-Allsopp argues that the best parallels for אני הגבר "I am the man" come from the self-presentation formulae of ANE royal inscriptions (e.g., "I am Azitiwada, the blessed one of Baal," or "I am Zakkur, king of..."), thus alluding to the גבר as a king-figure of sorts.[34] We cannot be certain. Renkema notes that the primary meaning for גבר can be found in the Psalms, where he is identified as an exemplary, righteous follower of Yahweh. "Taste and see that Yahweh is good; blessed is the man (הגבר) who trusts in him" (Ps 34:9); "From Yahweh the steps of a man (גבר) are prepared and he delights in his way" (Ps 37:23); "Blessed is the man (הגבר) who places his trust in Yahweh" (Ps 40:5).[35] In this light, the "man" of 3:1 is an exemplary, Yahwistic devotee, and we may reasonably assume the intended reader is meant to emulate the גבר's posture in the face of suffering.

Of course, the man's present situation is miserable. Parataxis and enjambment are present in numerous places, giving the poem a feeling of jagged unrest. Complaint erupts from the man's lips and is full of tragic, ironic reversals. Hillers sees at least the first six verses as "a reversal of the Twenty-Third Psalm,"[36] and Van Hecke as an "anti-Psalm 23":[37] this shepherd afflicts/abuses his sheep with his rod, drives them into "darkness and not light,"[38] and forces them to lay down among the dead. The man's treatment is harsh, on par with Zion's suffering. His flesh and skin are consumed, his bones are shattered (v. 6); he is set up for target practice (v. 12-13). The imagery of a divine shepherd is transformed: Yahweh is a bear and lion, the very animals against which ANE shepherds were meant to protect.[39] "The divine assault penetrates (as an arrow) to the very core of human intimacy [כליות; lit.

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[34] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 108.

[35] N.B. The usage of הגבר is noteworthy in Pss 34 and 37 because these too are acrostics.

[36] Hillers, *Lamentations*, 124. See also Berlin, *Lamentations*, 86.

[37] Pierre J.P. Van Hecke, "Lamentations 3,1-6: An Anti-Psalm 23," *SJOT* 16.2 (2002): 264-282.

[38] Cf. Amos 5:18, where the Day of Yahweh is described as חֹשֶׁךְ ולֹא־אוֹר (see also Joel 2:1-2; Zeph 1:14-16).

[39] Antje Labahn, "Wild Animals and Chasing Shadows: Animal Metaphors in Lamentations as Indicators of Individual Threat," in P. van Hecke (ed.), *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (BETL, 187; Leuven: Peeters Press, 2005), 67-97.

the kidneys; v. 13]."[40] The man is "cut off" or "cast" (√זנח) so far from peace that the memory of good things in life seems to have evaporated. Provan describes the man as having "been banished from the realm of peace."[41] Yahweh is not named once until the end of v. 18, yet his agency is unmistakable and harsh. Gerstenberger's observation on Lam 2:1-8 is applicable here as well: "The passage at hand, making Yahweh the exclusive executioner of castigation – with no mitigation by intermediary enemies – constitutes a special discourse in complaint and lamenting agendas."[42] He further argues that a form of theological equivocation existed among Yahwism: "Modern logic, which postulates a discrepancy between acknowledging one's guilt, accepting the sanctions of Yahweh (executed by hostile people), and denouncing those enemies [used by Yahweh] was unknown at the time; a different partisan rationality was working in ancient times."[43] That we have textual evidence attesting to this reality is beyond doubt. See, for example, Isa 10:5-34, esp. v. 20: "On that day, what's left of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no longer depend on the one who beat them. Instead, they will faithfully depend on the Lord, the holy one of Israel." Also Jer 50:7: "All who found them have devoured them, and their enemies have said, 'We are not guilty [לא נאשם], because they have sinned against the Lord.'" Equivocation exists in that both the nations and Yahweh are identified as the one "who beat them." Such logic permeates Lamentations as well, yet it is my contention that this reasoning reaches a breaking point throughout 3:31-42a.

b. The Resignation of the גבר (3:19-21)

Many see 3:19-21 as the moment of transition from despair to hope. He begins in v. 19 with a plea for Yahweh to remember his "homelessness" – echoing the fate of Zion herself in Lam 1:7a[44] – and then lets us know in v. 20 that he certainly remembers his sufferings. These depressive remarks are suddenly followed by an abrupt change toward hope and confidence. All note the interpretive

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[40] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 113.

[41] Provan, *Lamentations*, 89.

[42] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 487; see Pss 44; 88; Job 7:11-21; 13:18-28; 30:20-23; etc.

[43] Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2*, 495.

[44] זכרה ירושלים ימי ומרודיה עניה "Jerusalem remembers the days of her miserable homelessness."

awkwardness of the shift, as it is clearly unexpected and rather harsh. Nonetheless, I disagree with this popular interpretation on mainly syntactical grounds, and propose we shift the man's hopeful transition to vv. 22ff.

The syntax of v. 21 is where the primary issues lies, specifically the particle עַל־כֵּן. It normally links with *previous* argumentation that gives grounds for a *present* conclusion, much the same way "therefore" functions in English syntax. What has caused interpretive confusion for commentators is that one wonders what argument would lead the man to conclude that he has "hope" (אוֹחִיל), especially after twenty verses of bitter complaint? At any length, this is how most interpret אוֹחִיל, a conclusion I doubt. A bit more evidence can be found in the man's lexical referent, an unidentified "this" (זֹאת) that he "returns to his heart" or "calls to mind" (אָשִׁיב אֶל־לִבִּי). The most natural antecedent is to be found in vv. 19-20, with his appeal for Yahweh's remembrance. Given the clearly negative material in these verses, many conjecture that עַל־כֵּן here simply breaks syntactical convention and refers to the *following* strophe,[45] potentially constituting enjambment. In order to make sense out of this approach, though, most add in a disjunctive "but" to mark the shift in argumentation. This is reflected in, for example, the NRSV:

> But this I call to mind,
>   and therefore I have hope:
> The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases...[46]

Some, on the other hand, identify זֹאת's antecedent in 3:20-21, involving a textual emendation. As already pointed out in the translation above, 3:21 contains one of the supposed *Tiqqune Sopherim*, where נַפְשִׁי replaces the supposedly original נַפְשֶׁךָ "your [viz., God's] soul."[47] The poet would then be claiming that God is deeply affected, even moved to compassion, because of the גֶּבֶר's plight. The entire line would read: "You continually remember and your soul will be concerned over me." If this is correct, the man is reflecting upon the certainty that God surely will remember, and the mysterious referent for which we are seeking in v. 21 is found. Both Albrektson and Gottwald emend 3:20 to the

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[45] Albrektson provides a helpful summary and list of commentators adopting this position (*Studies in the Text*, 143-145).

[46] See also NET, NIV, NLT, NCV, CEV, ESV.

[47] LXX reads ψυχή μου, "my soul," as does *Tg. Lam.*

Tiq Soph.[48] And so Gottwald, for example, translates: "Yea, thou wilt surely remember, and thy soul will give heed to me. This I call to mind, therefore I have hope." This is an attractive reading, and certainly provides not only a smoother transition between vv. 21-22, but provides an explicit predicate for the "hope" expressed in v. 21b, potentially resolving an interpretive crux. To further support these moves, one could even read ותשיח as deriving from √שׂיח, "to be concerned with something, considering or speaking."[49] If correct, these changes would make this verse, in form critical terms, a *Heilsorakel* ("salvation oracle") in the lament genre, which prompts a shift in mood.[50] But very few have followed suit. Both Hillers and Provan reject this reading on the doubtful authenticity of the *Tiq Soph*[51] (but the latter goes too far in claiming that "nor does this reading in any case make such good sense in the context").[52] However attractive the נפשך reading, the doubtful nature of this particular *Tiq Soph* should lead us to prefer the supposed scribal change.

Furthermore, it seems commentators have read too much into the lexical connotation of אוחיל (√יחל). זאת refers most naturally to the preceding verses rather than the proceeding. So, rather than signifying the point of hopeful change, 3:21 instead ends as a note of resignation by the גבר. LXX Lam 3:21b supports this with its choice of verb: διὰ τοῦτο ὑπομενῶ "...therefore I will wait/endure" (ὑπομένω also in 3:24, 26), a nuance correctly picked up by the NETS. The poet wanly commits to waiting in the face of overwhelming suffering and deafening silence from Yahweh. The root יחל simply means "wait," generally carrying a sense of expectancy.[53] In many passages this sense seems quite strong, and this seems to be the shift in 3:24, where the object of and rationale for "waiting" has changed from horrible suffering in 3:19-20 to Yahweh and his steadfast love. But we have not yet gotten there in 3:21, and it seems to me we have more a sense of resignation, a soul so bowed down under oppression that no other option seems to present itself. It is as if the poet is saying, "Well, there's nothing else to do. I

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[48] Albrektson, *Studies in the Text*, 141-145; Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, 13.

[49] So Albrektson, *Studies in the Text*, 143.

[50] See J. Begrich, "Das presterliche Heilsorakel," *ZAW* 52 (1934): 81-92; Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*, 181-182.

[51] For discussion of the issues, see Hillers, *Lamentations*, 55-56; Carmel McCarthy, *The Tiqqune Sopherim and Other Theological Corrections in the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament* (OBO, 36; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 120-123.

[52] Provan, *Lamentations*, 92.

[53] *HALOT* s.v. יחל.

suppose I will just wait..." It is true that there is undoubtedly a sense of expectancy here; likely the poet has in mind a "waiting *for*" God. But this should be tempered by the immediate context, in which the poet has just proclaimed that his future and "hope" (יחל√) are gone (3:18). The poet waits for God, not because he has any confidence in divine goodness, but because there is nowhere else to go. He has been reduced to nothing. Similar examples of יחל connoting wanness can be found in Pss 69:4b and 119:81-82:

כלו עיני מיחל לאלהי

My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God...

לתהכ לתשועתך נפשי לדברך יחלתי
כלו עיני לאמרתך לאמר מתי תנחמני

My soul languishes for your salvation; I wait for your word...
My eyes fail with watching for your promise;
I ask, "When will you comfort me?"

The poetic interplay of יחל in 3:19 and 3:24 intensifies the ambiguity in the poet's mind – what is he waiting for, and why should he wait? 3:21 closes the complaint section of chapter 3:1-21 on an ambiguous note. It is suddenly, almost harshly reversed in 3:22ff., and יחל is drastically rehabilitated in the light of this newfound theodic fervor. Such violent shifts in emotional states can be indicative of trauma and attempts at cathartic rationalization. First, we encounter the sharp adjustment to theodicy beginning in 3:22-24.

c. The גבר's Transition to Theodicy (3:22-33)

3:22-24: "Waiting" Transformed into "Hope"
Rather than clarifying any shift toward hope from v. 20, 3:22-24 signal an unexpected change in tone as the man suddenly describes God's faithful love and covenant loyalty, what O'Connor describes as a "sudden emotional reversal."[54] The text reads:

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[54] O'Connor, "Lamentations," 1051.

Yahweh's loving kindnesses are surely not ended surely his mercies do not fail.	חסדי יהוה כי לא־תמנו כי לא־כלו רחמיו
They are new every morning! Great is your faithfulness!	חדשים לבקרים רבה אמונתך
"Yahweh is my portion," says my soul; therefore, I will wait for him.	חלקי יהוה אמרה נפשי על־כן אוחיל לו

The first line is difficult. The MT reads תָמְנוּ, "*we* are (not) ended," but some emend to read תָמוּ, "*they* have (not) ceased."[55] One Hebrew manuscript reads this, and Syriac and *Tg. Lam.* seem to suggest likewise. Nineteen LXX MSS. lack this strophe, but extant evidence reads: τὰ ἐλέη κυρίου ὅτι οὐ συνετελέσθησαν οἱ οἰκτιρμοὶ αὐτοῦ κ.τ.λ. Certainty is not possible (and the line remains sensible as it stands in the MT), but I am ultimately persuaded toward emendation on the basis of strong chiastic parallelism:

(A)   חסדי יהוה Yahweh's loving-kindness

(B)   כי לא־תמו surely they are not ended

(B¹)   כי לא־כלו surely they do not fail

(A¹)   רחמיו his [Yahweh's] mercies

The rare but important construct chain חסדי יהוה occurs only here, Pss 89:2; 107:43, and Isa 63:7. In each instance the phrase depicts divine action that demonstrates relational commitment and faithfulness to involved parties: the king and his descendants (Ps 89:2), Israel (Ps 107:43), and the remnant within Israel (Isa 63:7). Paul House notes the link with these terms and God's covenant with Israel in Exod 34:6-7, where God renews the broken covenant after the golden calf incident due to him being "compassionate [רחום] and gracious" and "full of mercy [חסד] and faithfulness."[56] This possible allusion certainly fits the context of Lamentations, where covenant renewal is desperately needed. The man begins to produce a theodicy even at this point, recalling a foundational tenet of Israel's

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[55] GKC suggests emendation in the context of the strengthening of consonants: "Very doubtful are the instances in which compensation for the strengthening is supposed to be made by the insertion of a following נ. Thus for [...] תָמְנוּ Lam 3²², read תַּמּוּ" (GKC §20o).

[56] House, *Lamentations*, 414.

faith: though punishment comes from Yahweh's hand, the fact that his loving-kindness and mercies do not fail should provide hope for eventual restoration. It is an anticipatory exclamation. Concerning 3:24a, Berlin notes that to "have a portion [an inheritance] in" a king is to acknowledge his sovereignty (cf. 2 Sam 20:1) and therefore to have Yahweh as one's inheritance is perhaps an acknowledgment of his sovereign rule.[57] Lam 3:24b transforms the vocabulary of "waiting": where in 3:21 the גבר resigns himself to wait (עלֿ־כן אוחיל), in v. 24b we have an object of waiting supplied: "Therefore I will wait *for him*" (עלֿ־כן אוחיל לו). Lam 3:22-24 as a section is, in form-critical terms, an "avowal of confidence," common to individual laments.[58]

3:25-30: The Stereotypicality of Grief

As mentioned several times already, vss. 25-39 as a unit comprises a didactic text meant to display normative, pious behavior in the face of divine punishment.[59] Lamentations as a whole is marked by a high degree of parataxis rather than logical argument, but apart from any other portion of Lamentations the present strophes are uniquely linked by a sort of teaching argumentation in the form of wisdom material.

The ט-stanza begins with the same word in each verse, טוב "good." Verse 25 expands on the notion of "waiting for Yahweh" developed in 3:24, varying the lexical texture while more explicitly evoking connotations of "hope" (תקוה; √קוה I): "Yahweh is good to those who hope in him [√קוה I], to the soul that seeks him [√דרש]." Further reasons are supplied as to why one may or should wait for Yahweh:

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[57] Berlin, *Lamentations*, 93.

[58] See Westermann, *Lamentations*, 173. Gerstenberger sees 3:19-36 as an "affirmation of confidence" (*Psalms, Part 2*, 492-493). See Patrick D. Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1986): "The individual laments are in many ways strongly stereotypical. That is, in moving from one lament to the other, one can encounter much of the same structure and content repeated, with some variation in the images and primary metaphors used. The enemies themselves are talked about in very typical stereotyped language. Clichés of all sorts are used throughout the psalms" (50).

[59] Those adopting this view have been noted above (Mintz, Heater, Brandscheidt, Middlemas, Heim, Krašovec, W. Kaiser, Berges, Labahn, etc.).

the deity is "good" to such people. It is "good" to bear the "yoke," recalling for the reader the polyphony of Lam 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.

Notice here that whereas in Zion's case her על ("yoke") is meant to evoke pity in the reader for her suffering, the man's על is טוב! One should also notice the likely canonical dialogism with Deut 28 and Jer 27-28:

> Because you did not serve the Lord your God joyfully and with gladness of heart for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and lack of everything. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you. (Deut 28:47-48)

> But any nation that will bring its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will leave on its own land, says the Lord, to till it and live there. I spoke to King Zedekiah of Judah in the same way: Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live. (Jer 27:11-12)

> Sometime after the prophet Hananiah had broken the yoke from the neck of the Prophet Jeremiah, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: "Go, tell Hananiah, 'Thus says the Lord: You have broken wooden bars only to forge iron bars in place of them!' For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: 'I have put an iron yoke on the neck of all these nations so that they may serve King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and they shall indeed serve him.'" (Jer 28:12-14)

There is a high level of ambivalence between Lam 1 and 3, Deut 28, and Jer 27-28 concerning the nature of this "yoke" and how it is to be borne.[60] It certainly seems plausible that the wisdom being put forth by the גבר in Lam 3:27 implies something akin to, "Do not imitate Hananiah!" How one is meant to bear this yoke is elaborated in the י–strophe:

> Let him sit alone and be silent,
>   for he [Yahweh] has laid it [viz., the yoke] upon him.
> Let him put his mouth in the dust;
>   perhaps there is hope.
> Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him;

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[60] Cf. also the NT witness in Matt 11:30 where Jesus says, "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Gk. ζυγός = LXX Lam 3:27 ζυγός (MT על).

let him be satisfied with scorn.

Olyan's taxonomy would understand this section as a rite of "penitential-petitionary mourning," where sin is present, confessed, and must be borne as chastisement in order for forgiveness to occur.[61] The sufferer is instructed to wait "in silence," and one may be tempted to merely categorize the advice as "fairly innocuous and conventionally pious" (see Pss 37:7; 39:2; 62:1, 5; Isa 30:15; etc.).[62] But how, we should wonder, is this meant to correspond with the means of response in the rest of the poems of Lamentations? The narrator of Lam 1-2 counsels precisely the opposite. Zion, who "sits alone" (ישבה בדד; Lam 1:1), is told, "Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches! Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord!" (2:19). If we are to understand the גבר of Lam 3 as the same narrator of chs. 1-2, the conflicted dialogism is even more pronounced. Indeed, he himself is hardly silent up to this point (3:1-21). Lee thinks the didactic voice of 3:25-39 is that of a new, "orthodox" speaker.[63] Others see more continuity, such as Thomas who views the inconsistency as evidence of the text's "openness," leaving both penitential silence and loud complaint as equally viable options for the reader.[64] I am not convinced by either option, but rather see this section as both fundamentally incompatible with the rest of the poem(s) *and* still the voice of the גבר. It reflects genuine ambivalence and contradiction, but this so-called "orthodox" didactic voice will be passively double-voiced so that its rhetorical force is consonant with the complaint of 3:1-21.

The sapiential nature of the section is further established as the *manner* of waiting/seeking is now introduced with a listing of conventional acts of penitence that mirror mourning (3:26-30). The language is stereotypical, but this in no way should distract from the emotional intensity conveyed. Dobbs-Allsopp rightly notes that the poetry's stereotypicality preserves "these words' life-enhancing capacities, making them reutterable, reusable, able to be fitted even today for the saying of the unsayable."[65] He quotes Czeslaw Milosz's analysis of Polish victims of the German occupation during

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[61] Olyan, *Biblical Mourning*.

[62] Parry, *Lamentations*, 103.

[63] Lee, *The Singers of Lamentations*, ch. 5.

[64] Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*, 209-211.

[65] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 115.

World War II, where Milosz observed that these peoples expressed extreme trauma through traditional clichés, "topoi polished by long use like pebbles in a stream":[66]

> As to the manner of style, we observe in general a tendency to simplify the style. The "novelty" of the matter finds reflection both in "small devices" of expression (metaphors, comparisons, etc.) and in formulas of certain works, as well as in their fabric and their internal components. Those results enrich a familiar repertory, without, however, going beyond the framework of perfectly explicable changes. On the contrary, there is not even one work deserving attention, where the author tries to express horror by going beyond the traditional communicative language or by disintegrating it.[67]

Such observations are apt for the present thesis, as it helps build a bridge of continuity between the impassioned complaints of 3:1-21 and the (seemingly) calm paraenesis of 3:22-39. In fact it is not calm at all. The words are "reutterable" caches of traditional consolation, easily drawn upon due to how little effort is needed to construct them; they are "ready made." But lurking underneath this wisdom teaching is an unsettled soul. This theodicy is a frantic attempt to construct a bridge of safety, yet it remains over troubled waters and we should never lose sight of the continuation of the גבר's troubled disposition. We are in the midst of a brief respite that will soon disintegrate. In Bakhtinian terms, these topoi will be revealed as ironically and passively double voiced: the established repertory is utilized but put to very different use when subverted by the work as a whole.

While the actual sayings collected here are diverse, the mood and subject draw upon Judah's wisdom tradition, counseling patience, longsuffering, penitence, and so on. Some have even drawn parallels between the choric function of Job's friends and the present theodicy.[68] Namely, we find here the counsel that if one would only endure this suffering long enough and confess one's transgression, Yahweh will eventually turn and save. Even so, Thomas is right to observe that restoration in Lam 3 "is liminal at best."[69] "*Perhaps* there is hope" (אולי שׁי תקוה; 3:29b). Indeed, the significance of this אולי deserves attention: the confident, somewhat detached rhetoric of 3:22-28 is now shown to have a chink in its armor. Westermann observes that "in an avowal of confidence such a qualifier would have

[66] Czeslaw Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 65; cited in Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 115-116.

[67] Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry*, 68.

[68] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 120; Berlin, *Lamentations*, 92-94.

[69] Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*, 188.

no place; there the expression of confidence is voiced without hesitation. One never finds an avowal of confidence hedged this way in the Psalms, for example."[70] This fragile liminality begins to unravel, I suggest, with this one small qualifier, underscoring a portrait of wavering conviction. Even the textual tradition shows unease at this point: Ziegler decides to omit the verse completely,[71] and the Syriac and Peshitta translate אוּלַי with "because" (there is hope).

3:31-33: Yahweh's *Opus Alienum*

The present strophe is both *structurally* and *theologically* central for the whole of Lamentations. By itself this is, of course, not a unique claim. I depart, however, from the majority of interpreters in the precise message conveyed by this central strophe, particularly 3:33.

Each deictic כִּי operates here asseveratively, providing both rationale for the previous statements and emphasis for each subsequent theological claim. The transition from theodicy into antitheodicy picks up speed here, dissolving in each line and finding a new height in 3:33. From 3:31-33, Yahweh's role as causal agent is successively problematized through the imagery of *duration*, *restoration*, and *inner conflict*:

[*Limited Duration*]	Surely Adonai, he will not reject [us] forever.
[*Eventual Restoration*]	Surely if he torments, then he will have compassion in measure with his abundant loving-kindness.
[*Inner Conflict*]	Surely abusing and tormenting persons... these are against his nature!

Dialogistic polyphony permeates the strophe. Previous assertions are heavily qualified if not outright contradicted as the theological tension increases: In 3:31 the man denies that Adonai "will reject forever," yet earlier we were told that "Adonai rejected his altar" (Lam 2:7a; cf. 5:20-22).[72] Whereas in Lam 1:5b, 12c Yahweh "tormented" (הוֹגָה) Zion for her transgressions, Lam 3:32, 33 claim that this

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[70] Westermann, *Lamentations*, 177; cf. Joel 2:14; Amos 5:15; Zeph 2:3.

[71] Extant evidence reads δώσει ἐν χώματι στόμα αὐτοῦ εἰ ἄρα ἐστιν ἐλπίς. The verse's absence in many manuscripts may be due to haplography with the identical introductory terms of 3:29 and 3:30, but given the prominent threefold acrostic structure this seems an unlikely reason for the omission of an entire verse. Scribal transmission error due to damaged manuscripts is more likely.

[72] Parry is mistaken to underplay the significance of this tension (*Lamentations*, 106).

"torment" (יגה√ ;ויגה ,הוגה) will end and be met with divine "comfort/compassion" (רחם), echoing the lack thereof in Lam 1:2b, 7c, 9b, 16b, 17a, and 21a. Furthermore, we have been told that "Adonai has destroyed without mercy" (2:2a), "he has demolished without pity" (2:17b), "slaughtered without mercy" (2:21c), and we will soon hear that God has "killed without pity" (3:43).[73]

Lam 3:33 should be approached with a level of sobriety, taking care not to over- or under-determine the passage's significance. Structurally, the verse stands in the center of both chapter 3 and Lamentations as a whole, and this certainly seems an intentional feature. Two important difficulties are apparent in interpreting this verse: (i) How are we to understand the metaphor of God's "heart" (לב)? and (ii) How does this theological statement relate to the surrounding material? Question (ii) will be dealt with at a later point when synthesizing Lam 3 as a whole. For now, we need to explore the Hebrew metaphor for the heart.

As to the first question, there are a surprising variety of approaches throughout history. Most modern commentators (and many of the major English translations) render the phrase כי לא מלבו as something similar to, "he does not willingly," pointing out that the Hebrew metaphor for "heart" does not precisely correspond to English usage, but rather refers to the seat of decision-making, a person's will. The idea, then, seems to be one of denying caprice in Yahweh's punishing action. This corresponds with many older interpreters. Calvin translates quite literally – *Quia non affligit ex corde suo* – and notes that the Lord afflicts only in response to sin.[74] Ambrose interprets the phrase as saying, "He does not bring down [afflictions] with His whole heart," but instead God is one "who reserves the intention of forgiving."[75] Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Kara gloss the phrase with מרצונו "from his will." See also *Leqaḥ Tob*: "*For he did not afflict from his heart.* That is to say, when the Lord brings trouble on Israel he does not do so willingly, in order to afflict them." Targum has an interesting paraphrase, removing Yahweh as the subject from the first half of the line:

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[73] See Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 121. These four instances of pity/mercy are חמל√.

[74] Calvin, *Commentaries*, 421-422.

[75] Ambrose of Milan, *De paenitentia*; *NPNF* 2.10:333. Cf. the Greek tradition, *L'*, Tht., Ambr., and PsCypr.: …εταπειωνσεν εξ ολης της (>Tht.ᴾ) καρδιας αυτου ουδε απωσατο.

> For because no one afflicted his soul,
> nor removed pride from his heart,
> therefore he caused destruction to come upon the sons of men.

Lam. Rab. offers a midrash based on an apparent double interpretation of the phrase לא ענה מלבו.[76] The first option, it is said, is to vocalize so that Israel is taken as the implied subject: לֹא עָנָה מִלְבּוֹ "He [Israel] did not answer from the heart."[77] To "not answer from the heart" denotes that what is said from the lips is not consonant with what is in the heart. The midrash then identifies two instances where this occurred, at Sinai and in Babylon. The former is "proven" by Ps 78:36-37, the latter in that they praised Nebuchadnezzar with their lips. The second vocalization, then, is what we find in the MT: לֹא עִנָּה מִלִּבּוֹ, where it is glossed as God being "unwilling" to afflict Israel.[78]

Modern interpreters tend to follow the same line of thought. Fredrik Lindström, for example, views "from his heart" as referring to an arbitrary punishment of God.[79] Similarly, Gottwald: "The expression [...] is the high water mark in Lamentations' understanding of God...The angry side of his nature, turned so unflinchingly against Jerusalem, is not the determinative factor in the divine purposes. Begrudgingly, regretfully, if there is no other way toward his higher purposes, he may unleash the forces of evil, but 'his heart' is not in it."[80] But a number of interpreters have rightly highlighted the problematic nature of understanding the expression in terms of Yahweh's "willingness." Vermigli and Calvin express agitation at the idea that God may do something unwillingly. Calvin notes, "[T]here is no doubt but that God never punishes men except when

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[76] See *Lam. Rab.* 3:33 §9.

[77] The LXX apparently read the verb ענה from ענה I rather than ענה II, hence ἀπεκρίθη.

[78] The midrash then concludes with this: "The Holy One, blessed be he, said: Let the mouth at Sinai come and atone for the mouth in Babylon, and let the heart in Babylon come and atone for the heart at Sinai. Nevertheless, *He grieved the sons of men.* He brought upon them *an adversary and an enemy* (Esth 7:6), namely Haman, and he plotted their massacre." Haman's role in *Lam. Rab.* will show up again in 3:37.

[79] Fredrik Lindström, *God and the Origin of Evil: A Contextual Analysis of Alleged Monistic Evidence in the Old Testament* (ConBOT, 21; Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1983), 222.

[80] Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, 51; cf. Westermann, Provan, Hillers, Salters, Parry, Thomas.

constrained. There is, as I have said, an impropriety in the expression, but it is enough to know, that God derives no pleasure from the miseries of men."[81]

There are a number of Biblical references to the metaphor of one's "heart" that may shed some light on how we should move forward. First, it should be noted that commentators are mistaken to relegate the Hebrew "heart" *only* to the will/decisions, though it certainly includes that (Gen 8:21; Job 7:17, 36:5; Jer 44:21).[82] The לֵב can also refer to passions (Isa 40:2, 61:1; Jer 23:9), longing (1 Sam 4:13), even the center of divine emotions (Gen 6:6). God's heart is the ultimate source of his love and compassion for Israel, filled with warmth and tenderness (Hos 11:8). The Lord repeatedly calls people to love and trust him with all their hearts (Deut 6:5; Prov 3:5). A number of things are said to be able to "fill" or "dwell in" the heart, such as pride (Obad 3), pain (Gen 6:6; Isa 65:14), idols (Ezek 14:4), joy (Ps 4:7), wisdom (Exod 28:3; Prov 14:33), and even the word of God (Deut 30:14; Ps 119:11).

The idiom "to say in one's heart" may be understood to mean "to think" (e.g., Ps 35:25; Zeph 1:12). Plans are made in the heart (Gen 27:41; 1 Chr 17:2), and commitments are planned, kept, or broken there (Deut 30:17; 2 Chr 16:9; Prov 23:19; Dan 10:12; Mal 2:2). The heart is the place from which repentance stems (Joel 2:12), and God knows what is in the heart (2 Chr 6:30) as well as how to turn and move human hearts (1 Kgs 8:58; Ezra 1:1, 5). Famously, the heart may also be hardened, giving the imagery of one who has become obstinately opposed to divine ways (1 Sam 6:6; Ps 95:8; Ezek 3:7). God is portrayed as an agent who sometimes hardens hearts for divine purposes (Exod 14:4, 8; Deut 2:30; Josh 11:20).

By analogy with human beings, the Hebrew heart can also convey the idea of "character," a person's entire nature (1 Sam 10:9; 1 Kgs 8:23; Ps 51:12). Jeremiah 31:33 offers imagery of the heart as the place from which covenant fidelity stems. Jeremiah also puts into Yahweh's mouth the striking claim that the horrors of child sacrifice did not come forth from God's heart (Jer 7:31, 19:5, 32:35). The expansive use of this metaphor throughout the Hebrew Scripture mitigates the tendency to read Lam

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[81] Calvin, *Commentaries*, 422.

[82] *Pace*, e.g., O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, 51.

3:33 as merely referencing Yahweh's "unwillingness." Such a translation dilutes the potent theology being offered here.

Occurrences in Num 16:28 and 24:13 are often referenced to support ideas of "unwillingness," but the analogical parallel does not carry over well for either instance. In the first, Moses is about to prove to the people that all of the works he has done were due to Yahweh's instruction, and adds that "it has not been of my own accord" (NRSV; כי לא מלבי). In the second, Balaam recounts to Balak what he said to the latter's servants: "If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I would not be able to go beyond the word of the Lord, *to do either good or evil of my own will* [לעשׂות טובה או רעה מלבי]; what the Lord says, that is what I will say." What to make of this in relation to Lam 3:33?

Though it is tempting on grammatical grounds to draw a strict parallel, theological considerations render this analogical parallel unconvincing. In both of these instances, it is a *human* who claims Yahweh's commands are either compelling in nature (Moses) or cannot be broken "from his [viz., the person's] own heart," i.e., by his own will (Balaam) – the implication being that the commands are from *Yahweh's* heart/will. In other words, an appeal to a different heart is made, a will bigger and stronger than a mere human's. But how then to understand something not being from Yahweh's heart? Is there a will that is higher than Yahweh, compelling Yahweh to act against his own heart? Like Gottwald, O'Connor offers several promising interpretations, but least helpful is her entertainment of precisely this possibility: "Perhaps chaotic forces outside divine control or forces set in action by human sinfulness corner God into punishing the sinful."[83] This seems quite an odd claim to make within Yahwistic devotion and, I would suggest, strains theological coherence. It is highly implausible that Judahites would imagine Yahweh doing something involuntarily. Besides historical improbability, theological propriety undermines this route. Castelo, for one, criticizes such conceptual moves by questioning whether sovereignty is the primary, or even a suitable category for negotiating God's relationship to the cosmos. "The consequences of such a commitment [to the category of sovereignty] is to use the language of restraint, powerlessness, or inability, which I find inappropriate for describing God. [...] Obviously, God did not prevent the Shoah or any other massive

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[83] O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, 51.

tragedy that comes to mind; rather than futilely defend God on this score, I sense that no other possibility exists outside of silence: a holy earnest, restless silence, but a silence no less."[84]

Regardless, more problematic is where the interpretive focus tends to lay among interpreters. I am persuaded that Lam 3:33 is concerned not with ontological power negotiations[85] but rather displays the גבר's inner-conflict in negotiating his received theodicy with the present crisis. This conflict is, significantly, projected onto the person of Yahweh, resulting in a striking claim not about the deity's willingness *but the very character of God.* Hence my translation: "Surely afflicting and tormenting persons...these are against his very nature!" Glossing the metaphor here to refer simply to God's willingness seems to me a gross reduction of what the poet is attempting to convey. Renkema – who translates the line as, "it does not conform to his heart" – is right to emphasize that "oppression itself is an extreme, a fact which is no less valid when God is the oppressor. For this reason √ענה II, with YHWH as subject, constitutes, in fact, a *contradictio in terminis.*"[86]

Against current trends of interpretation, I propose that this realization – that abuse is an *opus alienum* for Yahweh – elicits in the גבר not hope but *disillusionment.* Why? Surely it would seem the progressive distancing of Yahweh from "abuse" and "torment" in 3:31-33 is a *positive* assertion! While on one level that is obviously the case, on another I suggest that this claim so problematizes received theodicy that the man's theological justification for Jerusalem's suffering becomes undermined: If it is not in Yahweh's nature to act thus, how then to reconcile the present calamity? Did Yahweh actually do this? If it is actually contrary to divine nature, how and why did he oppress Judah anyway? Can Yahweh be trusted? If we are sure his essential nature precludes such oppression, then what are we to make of Babylon's onslaught? This is a frightening road to travel, unchartered territory for the exilic Judahites. The theological implications are potentially disastrous to certain theodic systems. Renegotiations of divine goodness and/or power necessarily follow with the claim in 3:33, and this is precisely what occurs in the strophes that follow. Commentators are right to note that at this point

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[84] Castelo, *Theological Theodicy,* 88n2.

[85] Viz., suggesting that Yahweh's will is compelled into action unwillingly by that of a "higher" will or being.

[86] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 409; cf. Pss 88:8, 90:15, 102:24.

the poet does not deny Yahweh's agency in abuse, but few emphasize enough the fundamental problematization that occurs in this strophe. As the structural and theological center of the book, the rhetorical function of Lam 3:33 is one of *destabilization* rather than securement. It disrupts any confidence in claims to Yahweh's oppressive agency throughout all of Lamentations, imbuing dialogic tension that forces the text as a whole to remain uncomfortably "open."

d. The Dissolution of the גבר's Theodicy (3:34-39)

Lamentations 3:22-39 has always been regarded as the crux of interpretive difficulty for Lamentations as a whole, but vv. 34-39 are especially problematic. A number of issues present themselves for interpreters and these deserve close examination before attempting to synthesize the whole. I count no less than seven major interpretive issues that will drastically affect one's reading of 3:34-39, and recent scholarly treatments have tended to reflect these issues in various depth.[87]

First, we must decide how to interpret 3:34-36. The strophe is difficult to understand, for each verse begins with an infinitive construct, but infinitive constructs do not occur without a governing verb. So, which verb? There are two options here:

(a) "see" (ראה) in v. 36b
(b) "torment/afflict" (יגה) in v. 33

If we follow option (a) – as most do – then we will translate something like the NRSV:

When all the prisoners of the land
   are crushed under foot,
when human rights are perverted
   in the presence of the Most High,
when one's case is subverted —
   does not the LORD see it?[88]

If we follow (b), then we will translate something like Hillers:

Because he does not deliberately torment men,

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[87] Robin Parry has provided the most detailed and lucid treatment of these particular issues to date (*Lamentations*, 106-115).

[88] So also, e.g., Berlin, *Lamentations*, 79; see *IBHS* §36.2.3b.

> or afflict them
> by crushing under foot
> all the prisoners of the earth,
> by denying a man justice
> before the Most High,
> by twisting a man's case
> without the Lord seeing.[89]

On this view vv. 34-36 elaborate on the afflictions in v. 33 that Yahweh may bring for a time but are not "from his heart" (3:33; Hillers = "deliberately").

Typically ל + infinitive construct *follows* its governing verb, and this seems to provide immediate grammatical preference for (b), where the governing verb is "torment/afflict" (יגה) in v. 33 with Yahweh as subject. Indeed, 3:34 begins with, "by crushing under *his* feet" (רגליו), and it seems most natural to take the pronoun as referring to *God's* feet as no other subjects have been introduced. However, this is not without its issues. This route would make God the subject of 3:34-36, but what then to make of 3:35? It seems quite awkward for us to see Yahweh as "perverting a man's justice *before the presence of the Most High*." Furthermore, 3:36 becomes tricky as well. Hillers finds a way around this by taking אדני לא ראה as a circumstantial clause, "twisting a man's case *without the Lord seeing*."[90] But these are both clearly strange ways to speak if Yahweh is indeed the subject of the verses. How would Yahweh not be aware of his own actions? Hillers's response is to point out similar instances in 2:20, 22, and 3:66. 3:66, for instance, reads, "May you [Yahweh] pursue them in anger and wipe them out from *under the Lord's heaven*." The parallels are not exact, though, as these constitute second person direct address and 3:36b is in the third person. As Parry points out, it is not, "You do x in the presence of Yahweh" but "Yahweh does x in the presence of Yahweh."[91]

Regardless, it is important to point out that the weight of the grammatical argument for infinitive constructs following their governing verb loses strength in the light of the acrostic form. It is required for each verse here to begin with ל, and this easily explains the unconventional grammar if the

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[89] Rashi and Kara also take the syntax in this way; again cf. Ambrose of Milan, *De paenitentia*; *NPNF* 2.10:333.
[90] See *IBHS* §36.2.3e.
[91] Parry, *Lamentations*, 109.

governing verb is to be located in 3:36b. Most compelling, in my view, is Parry's observation that no other strophe in Lamentations is grammatically incomplete without the preceding strophe, which is required in an approach like Hillers.[92] It is more natural, I think, to take the "oppressive one" in 3:34-36 to be evil people working against Yahweh's will. If the reader is thrown by the unconventional grammar, it is easily resolved once one reaches 3:36b if we take ראה as the governing verb.

But there remains the need to resolve how to interpret אדני לא ראה. Three possible translations have been offered:

    (i) "The Lord does not *see* the crushing underfoot of all the prisoners of the land..."
    (ii) "The Lord does not *approve of* the crushing underfoot of all the prisoners of the land..."
    (iii) "Does not the Lord *see* the crushing underfoot of all the prisoners of the land?"

Option (i) would be highly critical of Yahweh for not paying attention to the suffering of Jerusalem, and these words would likely be the words of an opponent of the main voice. Calvin, for instance, sees here "the impious words of those who complain that God is not moved by any compassion [...] that God has forgotten us, that he is either asleep or lies down inactive."[93] Options (ii) and (iii), on the other hand, defend Yahweh from such accusations. The lineation and syntax of the clause make taking the phrase as an indicative declaration the seemingly clear choice.[94] Rashi reads it this way: "None of these things *did the Lord see*: it neither seemed good to him, nor entered into his thought to behave thus!"[95] A possible instance of ראה signifying "approve" is Hab 1:13, which should be translated similar to the NET:

> You are too just to tolerate evil;
> you are unable to condone wrongdoing.
> So why do you put up with such treacherous people?
> Why do you say nothing when the wicked devour those more righteous than they are?[96]

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[92] Parry, *Lamentations*, 109.

[93] Calvin, *Commentaries*, 424.

[94] Cf. Renkema, "When one is able to avoid conceiving an absent interrogative particle here then the clause...has to be translated *'The Lord does not see (it)'*" (*Lamentations*, 416).

[95] He alludes here to Jer 7:31, 19:5, and 32:35.

[96] Many, as seen for example in the NRSV, translate something to the effect of, "Your eyes are too pure to behold evil, and you cannot look on wrongdoing." While syntactically both possibilities are viable, contextually the rhetorical flow strongly favors an approach like the NET.

טהור עינים מראות רע
והביט אל עמל לא תוכל
למה תביט בוגדים
תחריש בבלע רשע צדיק ממנו

Still, I am not aware of any other instance in which ראה carries the meaning "approve of,"[97] and when combined with the trope of "seeing" that saturates Lamentations we should prefer (i) or (iii) over (ii).[98] Gottlieb states that the phrase demonstrates the poet's own fluctuating feelings and "should be read as a statement in the indicative, as an expression of the fact that the man praying is conscious of being deserted by God."[99] O'Connor asserts that "the God of Lamentations is a blind God who, when asked to look, see, or pay attention [...], does not respond."[100] See also Jer 12:4 and Ps 94:5-7, the latter with its similar structure and quoted complaint:

| They crush your people, Yahweh, | עמך יהוה ידכאו |
| ...and they say, "Yah does not see!" | ...ויאמרו לא יראה־יה |

I find taking the indicative in an accusatory sense to be perfectly sensible syntactically, but contextually it should be rejected in favor of a rhetorical query for this fits better with the man's argumentative logic. Parry is representative of many when he objects: "Given that 3:37-39 seem to defend YHWH, we cannot give much credence to the idea that the speaker is wavering back and forth. If 3:34-36 really do criticize YHWH, then we must assume that the voice is that of another."[101] Though I share a rejection of 3:36b as an indicative statement, I find objections like Parry's here to carry little

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[97] Kara takes the phrase as "Yahweh does not see," but glosses: "It is resolved that it is not legitimate in his eyes to distort a man's case." Those who follow the view that ראה can mean "approve" include the NET; C. W. Eduard Nägelsbach, *The Lamentations of Jeremiah*, in J. P. Lange, *A Commentary on Holy Scripture*, 12 (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1870), 120; Heinrich Ewald, *Die Dichter des alten Bundes: Die Psalmen und Die Klagelieder* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1866), 339; Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, 14; Gordis, *Lamentations*, 143, 181; Theophile J. Meek, and William Pierson Merrill, "The Book of Lamentations" (*IB*, 6:27); cf. NJPS, "choose."

[98] Those who translate in this way include: Provan, *Lamentations*, 97-98; Gordis, *Lamentations*, 181; Gottlieb, *A Study on the Text of Lamentations*, 50; Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 121; O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, 51-52; Rudolph, *Klagelieder*, 229.

[99] Gottlieb, *A Study on the Text of Lamentations*, 50.

[100] O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, 52.

[101] Parry, *Lamentations*, 111.

weight (on their own, at least) in light of poetic polyphony and dialogism, but especially due to his misreading of the rhetorical flow of 3:37-39.

On my reading, the man's theodicy here reaches yet another level of dissolution. Whereas in 3:33 theodic confidence was destabilized by emphasizing the *opus alienum Dei*, here it is explicitly stated not only that others are responsible for oppression but that Yahweh is so far removed from causing the present crisis that *of course* he sees the injustice occurring "before the face of the Most High" (3:35). Origen, in fact, argues that through this strophe "we therefore learn what *not* to say about the Lord," explicitly stating that the he is "*not* the cause" (μηδὲ αἴτιον εἶναι) of the afflictions enumerated precisely because divine justice is loving and upright (το γὰρ δίκαιον ἀγαπᾷ καὶ εὐθύ).[102] אדני לא ראה is quite plausibly an instance of an unmarked interrogative (cf., e.g., Gen 27:24; 1 Sam 11:12; Jonah 4:11)[103] meant to continue the line of argumentation from 3:22ff., underscoring divine goodness and causal distance from the present evil. The Greek traditions read it in this way. ראה would then respond to the agonized cries in Lam 1:9c, 11c, 22a, and 2:20a (cf. 3:49-50, 59). I therefore support option (b): "Doesn't Adonai see this?!" It is worthwhile here to point out that certain strains of the Greek tradition also give clear signs of distancing divine causality: Some witnesses read κύριος οὐκ εἶπεν ("The Lord did not say/command!"), though some also read εἶδεν (see Ziegler's apparatus). While dittography remains a possible explanation for the repetition of εἶπεν, if we read with the former witnesses here a powerful rhetorical elision occurs between 3:36b-3:37, further underscoring theodic instability: ...κύριος οὐκ εἶπεν τίς οὕτως εἶπεν καὶ ἐγενήθη κύριος οὐκ ἐνετείλατο. The Hebrew syntax in the MT undoubtedly remains strained, but this may carry its own signification. Highlighting the role of aesthetic quality in conveying poetic meaning, Dobbs-Allsopp observes an important shift in the poet's construction of theodicy at this point in the poem:

> One effect of the density and complexity of this syntactic structure is to disrupt subtly but distinctly the ease and forthrightness of the poetry's meaning at this point, to slow the reading process down and to require our closer attention, if for no other reason than to decipher the syntax. Dissonance thus enters into

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[102] From fragment 79 of Origen's Commentary on Lamentations. Similarly, in a different context, Clement of Alexandria: πάντων μὲν γὰρ αἴτιος τῶν καλῶν ὁ θεός (*Stromata*, 1.5); θεὸς ἀναίτιος. κακῶν γὰρ ὁ θεὸς οὔποτε αἴτιος (*Stromata*, 5.14); κακίας δ᾽ αὖ πάντη πάντως ἀναίτιος [ὁ θεὸς] (*Stromata*, 7.2).
[103] GKC §150a.

the poetry's message at this point, like the sudden and unsettling rustle of the wind on an otherwise calm day that bears only the faintest echo of oncoming bad weather.[104]

This strained syntax continues into the מ-strophe where the theodicy reaches a new height of instability as the implications from 3:33-36 spill over into vv. 37-39. A similar problem to the interpretation of 3:36b is found in 3:37b: Do we take אדני לא צוה as:

(a) *A statement?* "The Lord did not command [it/this]."
(b) *A rhetorical question?* "Did the Lord not command it?" with an implied, "Yes, of course!"

Interpreting Lamentations 3:37

In interpreting Lam 3:37, one immediately notices the parallelism between 3:36b and 3:37b: אדני לא ראה // אדני לא צוה.[105] How then should we read v. 37? In the absence of a coordinating particle, the most natural reading of the second stitch is, like 3:36b, as an indicative statement: "The Lord did not command (this)." Calvin shows awareness of several interpretations of the passage, but offers a unique reading by viewing אדני לא צוה as a quotation of the impious: "*Quis iste, dixit; fuit, Deus non præcepit?* The prophet, after having mentioned the blasphemy which prevailed everywhere at that time [viz., 3:36b], strongly condemns so gross a stupidity. *Who is this?* He says. He checks such madness by a sharp rebuke—for the question implies an astonishment."[106] See too *Tg. Lam.*, whose paraphrase bears textual traces of taking the phrase nominatively: "Who is the man who has spoken *and an evil thing was* done *in the world, unless because they did that which they* were not commanded by *the mouth of the* Lord?"[107] Lamentations Rabbah also places these words in the mouth of another, namely, Haman: "'Who has commanded?' It was Haman who commanded, but the Holy One, blessed be He, did not command. Haman commanded: 'To destroy, to slay, to exterminate all the Jews' (Esth 3:13). But the Holy One, blessed be He, did not command: 'That his wicked plan which he had made

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

[105] Cf. Lindström, *God and the Origin of Evil*, 223-224.

[106] Calvin, *Commentaries*, 426.

[107] Christian M. M. Brady's translation in Parry and Thomas, *Great is Thy Faithfulness?*, Appendix 2, 228-247. Italicization is added by Brady to represent the expansions of the Targumist from the Hebrew.

against the Jews should return upon his own head' (Est. 9:25)."[108] Kara glosses: "This which Yahweh did not command. But if he did not command it, where did the harm sprout up from? Did it come to them, the oppressed prisoners of the earth, out of nothing?" He proceeds to emphasize, like *Tg. Lam.*, that what occurred was the inevitable consequence of persistent sin by human beings, therefore God is not to be sought as the source of evil or the reason why.

Renkema astutely draws a parallel from Ps 33:9, the only other place in the OT where the frequently used verbs אמר√, היה√, and צוה√ occur in such close combination: "For he said it, and it came to pass; he commanded it, and it stood" (כי הוא אמר ויהי הוא־צוה ויעמד).[109] The psalmist is here speaking of the goodness of creation. Renkema draws an allusive linkage between Ps 33:9 and Lam 3:37, along with the occurrence of the divine name associated with creation in 3:38 (עליון; e.g., Gen 14:99, 22, etc.), suggesting that Yahweh's cosmic, creative power is in view. The use of creation terminology stresses that questions of aetiology are in view – but with regard to the origins of what? Certainly the present Judahite crisis is the primary referent, but I will argue shortly that the combination of creation terminology along with the further nuancing in 3:38 evince another layer of connotation.

MT vocalization is worth pointing out in the present setting. The Masoretes rightly placed a *zaqef qaton* above ותהי, conceptually dividing the second stitch. Again, LXX seems to follow this line of thought in the 3:36b-37 sequence, and Rahlfs (though not Ziegler) even places an interrogative marker after the first stitch of v. 37: Τίς οὕτως εἶπεν, καὶ ἐγενήθη; κύριος οὐκ ἐνετείλατο.

Theodic dissolution and theological disillusionment pick up speed significantly in v. 37. Here we have the first definitive denial of Yahweh's involvement in Jerusalem's misery: "Adonai did not command this!" On a dialogical reading, objections that the poet simply couldn't mean this given the clear admission of Yahweh's involvement elsewhere in Lamentations are allayed. Polyphony and dialogism are so dynamically present in these poems that accusations of the book's self-contradiction are to be embraced as hermeneutically fruitful. Dialogic tension is especially marked here with Lam

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[108] *Lam. Rab.* 3:37, Parashah Three §91.1 B, C, D.
[109] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 418-419.

1:17bα: "Yahweh commanded (צוה) against Jacob that his neighbors should become his enemies." We have here not a systematic theology but poetic distress as the reader rides the waves of the גבר's theological crisis.

Interpreting Lamentations 3:38

The unraveling of theodicy continues in 3:38, which reads מפי עליון לא תצא הרעות והטוב. Here, three options seem possible:

    (a) *A statement?* With two further sub-options:
      (i) So with the CEB, for instance: "From the mouth of the Most High evil things don't come but rather good!"[110]
      (ii) So with Shlomo Weissblueth: "It is not from the mouth of the Most High that good and evil come."[111]
    (b) *A rhetorical question?* So with the NIV, for instance: "Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?" with an implied, "Yes, of course!"

So, is the speaker claiming that this "evil" is *not* from Yahweh (view a), or that it *is* from Yahweh (view b)? Like 3:37, the main question is whether the entire verse is to be taken as a nominative statement ("Good and evil do not come from the mouth of the Most High") or a rhetorical question ("Do not both good and evil come from the mouth of the Most High?"). If the former, the main question is whether the ו in והטוב is functioning with adversative force ("*but* [good]"), or rather as a copulative-conjunctive ("*and* [good]"). Interpretive tradition and contemporary trends lean heavily toward the latter option, yet in what follows I will seek to establish not only the plausibility of the former but preference for it. This will be displayed through an examination of relevant textual and interpretive traditions, syntactical analysis, and rhetorical flow from the preceding verses.

Calvin is again aware of two different readings, but sees the sense in both as synonymous. The first, as a question: "Cannot good and evil proceed from the mouth of the Most High?" The second as a

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[110] A hand-full of other scholars have supported something similar to this option, e.g., Renkema, *Lamentations*, 420-423; Gordis, *Lamentations*, 181-183; A. B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel: Textkritisches, Sprachliches und Sachliches*, vol. 7 (Leipzig, 1914), 43; Mitchell Dahood, "New Readings in Lamentations," *Bib* 59 (1978): 187. To my knowledge, no recent interpreters have supported this rendering.

[111] Shlomo Weissblueth, "מפי עליון לא תצא הרעות והטוב" (*Mipî ʿelyôn ʾlō tēṣē hārāʿôt wᵉḥaṭṭôb*" [Lam 3:38]) [in Hebrew], *Beth Miqra* 32 (1986-87): 64-67.

nominative statement, but quite uniquely rendered as a gloss of the "impious" declaration from his reading of v. 37: "Who is this that says, 'It comes to pass, when the Lord commanded it not'? As though good and evil should not proceed from the mouth of God."[112] Further on Calvin makes his preference known: "The Prophet says that *from the mouth of the Most High proceed good and evil.*"[113] Calvin offers only a red herring against the possibility of monism in such a statement: "Now they who object and say that God is thus made the author of evils, may be easily refuted; for nothing is more preposterous than to measure the incomprehensible judgment of God by our contracted minds."[114] Vermigli also expresses an awareness of multiple interpretations:

> FROM THE LORD'S MOUTH WILL NOT THERE COME FORTH EVILS AND GOOD? Some people read it in such a way that the first part affirms FROM THE MOUTH OF THE LORD EVIL WILL NOT COME FORTH, as if he should say, "Not willingly does he give evil, but you yourselves brought it upon yourselves by your sins." Now this GOOD they read affirmatively, as though he should say, "Good he gives freely and willingly." On the contrary, it is preferable that there be an examination of the blasphemy of those who used to wish that everything not be done by God; you have their words in Zephaniah 1[:12]: "People who say in their heart, 'The Lord does not do good nor does he do evil.'"[115]

Vermigli's reference to "some people [who] read it in such a way..." is likely to the Targum (though it is possible other textual traditions are referenced here), but he still seems to caricature such a reading by equating it with Zeph 1:12.

The paraphrastic *Tg. Lam.* attempts to translate 3:38 from the Hebrew ingeniously, yet, not unlike its treatment of 3:37, it bears clear textual traces of taking the phrase nominatively. It seems to disclose a situation where the Targum felt so constrained by the presence of a clear statement that it had to gloss accordingly. Also evident is *Tg. Lam.*'s intention to "theodicize" the Hebrew text, glossing

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[112] Calvin, *Commentaries*, 426.

[113] Calvin, Commentaries, 430.

[114] Calvin, Commentaries, 429.

[115] Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Commentary on the Lamentations of the Prophet Jeremiah*, The Peter Martyr Library (vol. 6), translated and edited by Daniel Shute (SECS, 55; Kirksville: 2002), 136.

sections where Yahweh may be portrayed as acting unjustly or capriciously.[116] The following

translation is by P. Alexander:[117]

מפום אלהא עלאה לא תפוק בשתא אלהן על ברת קלא
רמיחא בגין חטופין דאתמליאת ארעא ועדן דבעי למגזר
טובא בעלמא מן פום קודשיה נפקא

From the mouth of *God* Most High evil does not go forth, *without a Bat Qol*
intimating [*that it is*] *because of the robberies with which the earth is filled.*
But when he desires to decree good *in the world,* from the mouth of the Holy
One it goes forth.[118]

There are three significant quotations of Lam 3:38 by Origen of Alexandria, all written around the

mid-third century CE and each uniquely supports my proposed reading.[119] The remarkable quality of

these quotations plainly demonstrates that Origen represents an ancient reading tradition of Lam 3:38

that read a nominative statement with a disjunctive pair in the second stitch. It would be going too far

to suggest a radically different *Vorlage* of either Hebrew or Greek provenance, as the extant

syntactical evidence from both languages remains largely ambiguous. Nonetheless, at least the second

of Origen's quotations below gives a unique enough reading that the possibility of a different textual

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[116] Christian M. M. Brady, *The Rabbinic Targum of Lamentations: Vindicating God* (SAIS, 3; Leiden: Brill, 2003); *idem*, "Vindicating God: The Intent of Targum Lamentations," *JAB* 3 (2001): 27-40.

[117] Codex Vaticanus Urbinas Hebr. 1 (Urb. 1) is the basis of the Aramaic transcription and translation, for which see the facsimile introduced and translated by Étan Levine, *The Targum of the Five Megillot: Codex Vatican Urbanati 1* (Jerusalem: Makor, 1977); and *idem*, *The Aramaic Version of Lamentations* (New York: Hermon Press, 1981).

[118] Cf. C. Brady's translation for a slightly different take: "From the mouth of *God* Most High there does not issue evil, *rather by the hint of a whisper, because of the violence with which the land is filled. But when he desires to decree* good *in the world it issues from the holy mouth.*" Also see Alexander's footnote on 3:38: "Tg. Seems to have seen potential theological problems here and felt that careful phrasing was needed to avoid an amoral, fatalistic view of divine governance [...] He does not deny that God can command evil to take place [...] but God only does so in response to human sin. It is sin that is the root cause of evil, not God. Evil ultimately does not issue from God: punishment is his *opus alienum*. God, however, is the direct source of all good" (P. Alexander, 154-155, n. 53).

[119] Unfortunately, the currently available extant fragments of Origen's Hexapla shed very little light on the particular questions I am raising. See Frederick Field (ed.), *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt sive veterum interpretum graecorum in totum Vetus Testamentum fragmenta* (2 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1875). We shall have to wait for the completion of the IOSCS's Hexapla Working Group project to fully examine the extant fragments discovered since Field's publication.

tradition remains plausible. It is reasonable to conclude that Origen was not the first to read the text in this way, and certainly not the last. The first example is found in *Against Celsus*, and is identical to LXX (besides replacing ὑψίστου with κυρίου):

> Celsus in the next place, as if he were able to tell certain secrets regarding the origin of evils, but chose rather to keep silence, and say only what was suitable to the multitude, continues as follows: 'It is sufficient to say to the multitude regarding the origin of evils, that they do not proceed from God, but cleave to matter, and dwell among mortal things.' It is true, certainly, that evils do not proceed from God; for according to Jeremiah, one of our prophets, it is certain that *"out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and [but] good* [ἐκ στόματος κυρίου οὐκ ἐξελεύσεται τὰ κακὰ καὶ τὸ ἀγαθόν]."[120]

If we take Origen as reading a simple, copulative-conjunctive καὶ, we seem to attribute theological incoherence to him, not to mention mitigating the larger point he is making against Celsus. Can one really imagine Origen claiming that *nothing* comes from the Christian God, *neither* good nor evil? Hardly. Rather, he seems to be advocating the view that only good (and therefore *not* evil) comes out of the mouth of God. The statement is undoubtedly nominative. Lest one think Origen intended a copulative-conjunctive καὶ in his quotation of Lamentations, he continues, clarifying that he indeed intends to claim that *only* good, not evil, comes from the mouth of the Lord:

> But to maintain that matter, dwelling among mortal things, is the cause of evils, is in our opinion not true. For it is the mind of each individual which is the cause of the evil which arises in him, and *this is evil* [ἥτις ἐστὶ τὸ κακόν]; the actions which proceed from it are wicked, and there is, to speak with accuracy, nothing else in our view that is evil. I am aware, however, that this topic requires very elaborate treatment, which (by the grace of God enlightening the mind) may be successfully attempted by him who is deemed by God worthy to attain the necessary knowledge on this subject.[121]

Origen also quotes Lam 3:38 in two roughly contemporaneous works: his commentary on Matthew and a fragment from his commentary on Lamentations. Both instances give even clearer indication that he read the verse as a nominative statement. In *Comm. in Matt.* 13.6 (*ANF* 9:478) we find this:

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[120] See *Origenes Werke I: Contra Celsum I-IV*, ed. Koetschau et al. (GCS; Leipzig, 1899). Origen clearly takes the phrase as a nominative assertion, apparently reading καὶ with adversative force. See H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Harvard University Press, 1956), §2871. Crombie's translation in *ANF* of Origen's Lamentations quotation should be emended: "Out of the mouth of the Moth High proceedeth not evil *but* good." Cf. Rahlfs and Ziegler, in which this potential tension is eased by the presence of an interrogative, thereby producing a rhetorical question: ἐκ στόματος ὑψίστου οὐκ ἐξελεύσεται τὰ κακὰ καὶ τὸ ἀγαθόν;

[121] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4.66; *ANF* 4:527.

But they all 'speak unrighteousness loftily,' as many as say, that the cause of all the disorders which exist on the earth, whether of such generally or of each in detail, arises from the disposition of the stars; and such have truly 'set their mouth against the heaven,' when they say that some of the stars have a malevolent, and others a benevolent influence; since no star was formed by the God of the universe to work evil, according to Jeremiah as it is written in the Lamentations, *"Out of the mouth of the Lord shall come things noble and that which is good* [ἐκ στόματος κυρίου ἐξελεύσεται τὰ καλὰ καὶ τὸ ἀγαθόν]."

Remarkably, Origen removes the negator οὐκ and reads a copulative-conjunctive καὶ, along with reading τὰ καλὰ ("things noble") instead of τὰ κακὰ. In light of the quotation in *Against Celsus*, it is clear that this move is rhetorically intentional; even with these obvious emendations, the sense of the passage on this reading is synonymous. Again, the differences in quotation here are drastic enough to suggest either emendation or a different textual tradition. And finally the Greek fragment from Origen's commentary on Lamentations:[122]

οὐ γὰρ δύναται, φησί, τὰ ἐναντία ἐκ στόματος κυρίου ἐξεληλυθέναι, τὰ ἀγαθὰ καὶ τὸ κακὸν· οὔτε γὰρ δένδρον ἀγαθὸν καρποὺς πονηροὺς ποιεῖ, οὔτε δένδρον πονηρὸν καρποὺς ἀγαθούς. τὸ οὖν ἀδικεῖσθαι ἄνδρας ὑπὸ πονηρῶν παρὰ θείαν κρίσιν ἐστί, γίνεται δὲ ὅμως ἐν περιορωμένοις ὑπὸ Θεοῦ, καθὰ τοῖς Ἰσραηλίταις ὑπὸ τῶν πολεμίων συνέβη, καὶ ἐν ἐπιστροφῇ Θεοῦ λύεται. διὸ χρὴ ταύτην ἀναζητεῖν ἐπὶ τιμωρίᾳ [*sic*][123] παραδοθέντας.

[The text] says it is impossible for mutually opposed things to come from the mouth of the Lord – good *and* evil! For a good tree does not produce evil fruit, nor an evil tree good fruit. Therefore, when people suffer injustice because of evil ones it is contrary to divine justice. But it is nevertheless the case that they are among those who are watched over dearly by God, just as happened to the Israelites at the hands of their enemies, and then in turning back to God they were delivered. And so it's necessary to search out those who have been handed over to this punishment.[124]

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[122] Quoting fragment 79. Origen's commentary on Lamentations was lost, but may still be partially reconstructed from Byzantine catenae. This is the earliest Christian commentary on the book, and likely one of Origen's first as well (ca. 222-225 CE). For the critical edition of the reconstructed original, see Erich Klostermann (ed.), revised by Pierre Nautin, "Klageliederkommentar: Die Fragmente aus der Prophetenkatene," in *Origenes Werke III: Jeremiahomilien, Klageliederkommentar, Erklärung der Samuel – und Königsbücher,* GCS 6:235-279 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1983). Unfortunately, Joseph Trigg translated only a very small portion of Origen's commentary on Lamentations, and our particular section of concern is omitted. See his *Origen* (Early Church Fathers; London: Routledge, 1998), 73-85.

[123] Prb ταύτην... ἐπὶ τιμωρίαν.

[124] Cf. Plato's *Theaetetus*, 176a-c: "But it is not possible that *evil* [τὰ κακὰ] should disappear, Theodorus. For something is always needed which is *the contrary of the good* [ὑπεναντίον γάρ τι τῷ ἀγαθῷ]. And this something cannot have its seat among the Gods, but it must circulate in the realm of mortal nature in this present world. That is why one should strive to flee this world as swiftly as one can. This flight is, as far as possible, an assimilation in God. This assimilation consists in becoming just and holy by the help of reason. [...] The true

This final example solidifies Origen's understanding of Lam 3:38. In each of the above quotations, it is unclear whether Origen was working from memory, a different textual tradition, or partaking in intentional paraphrastic redaction. Given the variations on this single passage, the latter choice seems most likely, a situation where Origen was simply attempting to draw out the theological significance of the text that resulted in paraphrastic redaction. The possibility of Origen working from a well-defined textual tradition seperate from the LXX – e.g., perhaps the elusive εʹ-Quinta, ϛʹ-Sexta, or ζʹ-Septima versions referred to by Origen – is unlikely given that he tends to explicitly note when he draws from other sources such as Symmachus or Theodotion.[125] Whatever the case, it is clear that Origen read Lam 3:38 nominatively with a disjunctive pair in the second stitch. The evidence from Origen, LXX, *Tg. Lam.*, Calvin, and Vermigli demonstrate that my proposed reading of Lam 3:36-38 has a measure of provenance. Indeed, none of the ancient versions show any knowledge of an interrogative in 3:38. Ibn Ezra, Kara, and *Lam. Rab.* all read the passage as a statement as well.

Further support may be garnered through closer consideration of the syntax. First let us consider the option proposed by S. Weissblueth: "It is not from the mouth of the Most High that good and evil come."[126] Provan approvingly cites Weissblueth's rendering as plausible and at least preferable to other nominative formulations, but he criticizes proposals like mine by claiming "this cannot be correct [...] since the remainder of the chapter makes clear that God is responsible for what has happened."[127] He certainly goes too far in claiming that a nominative statement "is not the most natural way of taking the line after v. 37."[128] As I have attempted to show thus far, these types of criticisms rest upon faulty theological presuppositions and a myopic approach to the text that allows only linear monologue, not polyphonous dialogue. Weissblueth's translation seeks to emphasize humankind's responsibility for their own actions in the context of divine sovereignty, painting a picture of divinely given freedom to

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reason [to pursue virtue] is this: *God is never in any way unrighteous* [θεὸς οὐδαμῇ οὐδαμῶς ἄδικος]. He is righteous to the supreme degree..."

[125] See the discussions in Sidney Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 118-124; and Natalio Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: An Introduction to the Greek Versions of the Bible*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 155-161

[126] S. Weissblueth, "*Mipî ʿelyôn*," 64-67.

[127] Provan, *Lamentations*, 98.

[128] Provan, *Lamentations*, 99.

reap the consequences of our behavior. But his rendering strains theological plausibility, and I am not aware of any others who have followed his translation. It is highly unlikely the poet would make an assertion that borders so close to fatalistic deism. Consider, for instance, the parallel in Zeph 1:12:

> והיה בעת ההיא אחפש את ירושלם בנרות
> ופקדתי על־האנשים הקפאים על־שמריהם
> האמרים בלבבם לא ייטית יהוה ולא ירע

> And at that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps,
> and I will punish the people growing fat on the dregs in their wine,
> those who say in their hearts, "Yahweh will not do good, nor will he do evil."

One may also think of the fatalism expressed by Cain in *Tg. Neof.* Gen 4:8: "There is no judgment and no judge, no recompense for the just, nor punishment for the wicked" (cf. *Tg. Ps.-J. ad loc.*). Exegesis such as Wessblueth's fails to construct a plausible scenario in which the גבר would make such a claim at this point in the rhetorical flow and should be rejected. But what of the rhetorical query approach? This has certainly been the most popular, yet arguments in support have largely relied upon the belief that here the גבר is waxing sapiential, supporting the common Wisdom and prophetic traditions that regarded Yahweh as meticulously providential: all that comes to pass is the result of his word and/or hand.[129] In support of this, eight texts are repeatedly invoked and deserve attention:

Excursus: Texts of טוב *and* רע

The following texts are commonly marshaled in support of reading Lam 3:38 as a rhetorical question that supports meticulous providence: "Do not both good and evil come from the mouth of the Most High?" Each of the texts below contains significant collocations of "good" (טוב) and "evil" (רע) as predicates of divine activity, whether the parallel is on the level of vocabulary or concept. While there are certainly others that could be cited,[130] in my own reading these seven seem the most commonly cited. However rare these occurrences are in the Hebrew Bible, in the interest of theological coherence, it is argued, we should fit our reading of Lam 3:38

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[129] Cf. e.g. the exegesis of Löhr, Haller, Rudolph, Kraus, Plöger, Brandscheidt, Kaiser, Boecker, Provan, Hillers, O'Connor, Berlin, Dobbs-Allsopp, Parry, House, Thomas, etc.

[130] E.g., Num 24:13 analyzed above re Lam 3:33.

into this established mold. It is my argument that Lam 3:38 in fact breaks this mold and stands out as a remarkable counter-testimony.

(i) Deuteronomy 6:22

The Lord displayed before our eyes great and evil signs and wonders
against Egypt, against Pharaoh and against his entire household.

ויתן יהוה אותת ומפתים גדלים ורעים
במצרים בפרעה ובכל־ביתו לעינינו

(ii) Deuteronomy 30:15[131]

See, I have set before you today ראה נתתי לפניך היום
life and goodness, את־החיים ואת־הטוב
death and evil. ואת־המות ואת־הרע

(iii) Deuteronomy 32:39

See now that I, even I, am he; ראו עתה כי אני אני הוא
there is no god besides me. ואין אלהים עמדי
I kill and I make alive; אני אמית ואחיה
I wound and I heal; מחצתי ואני ארפא
and no one can deliver from my hand. ואין מידי מציל

(iv) Joshua 23:15

But just as all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you
have been fulfilled for you, so the LORD will bring upon you all the evil things
until he has destroyed you from this good land that the LORD your God has given you.

והיה כאשר־בא כאשר בא עליכם כל הדבר הטוב אשר דבר יהוה אלהיכם אליכם
כן יביא יהוה עליכם את כל־הדבר הרע עד־השמידו אותכם מעל האדמה
הטובה הזאת אשר נתן לבם יהוה אלהיכם

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[131] Also consider Deut 28:47-68, esp. vv. 52-57 where the writer lists siege warfare and cannibalism as covenant curses.

(v) Isaiah 45:7

I form light and create darkness,	יוצר אור ובורא חשׁך
I make peace [1QIsaᵃ = good] and create evil;	עשׂה שׁלום [טוב] ובורא רע
I the LORD do all these things.	אני יהוה עשׂה כל־אלה

(vi) Ezekiel 20:25-26

Moreover I gave them statutes that were not good and laws by which they could not live. I defiled them through their very gifts, in their offering up all their firstborn, in order that I might horrify them, so that they might know that I am the LORD.

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וגם אני נתתי להם חקים לא טובים ומשׁפטים לא יחיו בהם
ואטמא אותם במתנותם בהעביר כל־פטר רחם למען אשׁמם
למען אשׁר ידעו אשׁר אני יהוה

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(vii) Amos 3:6b

Does evil befall a city,	אם תהיה רעה בעיר
unless the LORD has done it?	ויהוה לֹא עשׂה

(viii) Job 2:10b

"Shall we receive good from the hand of God and not receive evil?"
In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

<div dir="rtl">

גם את הטוב נקבל מאת האלהים ואת הרע לֹא נקבל
בכל זאת לֹא חטא איוב בשׂפתיו

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Besides Deut. 30:15, which places responsibility in humans hands, each of these texts depicts Yahweh as the one who actively metes out both טוב and רע. Nonetheless, even in Deut 30:15 ultimately responsibility certainly falls on Yahweh, the one who forces this situation upon the people. Job 2:10b is quite straightforward, categorizing Job's suffering as רע dispensed by God himself (see also Job 42:11), but adds the curious justification of Job's words by claiming, "in all this Job did not sin with his lips." Whether this amounts to actual theological approval of Job's claim (viz., God does in fact do evil) or simply attesting to the validity of Job's honesty without commenting on the statement's truth-value (i.e., complaint against God is not inherently sinful) is in my view unclear (see Job 42:7-8).

Deuteronomy 30:15, 32:39, and Josh 23:15 depict Yahweh's role in the context of covenant relationship. The latter text clearly recalls the covenant ceremony of Deut 28-30, and it is well known that these texts reflect interesting parallels to ANE covenants and treaties. "Good" and "evil" generally correspond here to divine blessing (for obedience) and divine judgment (for disobedience). Indeed, "evil/destruction", according to the covenant, is not inherently a sign of Yahweh's abandonment of the people nor of divine impotence. Deuteronomistic tradition envisions a return after destruction: "When all these things have happened to you, the blessings and the curses I set before you, if you call them back to your mind [והשבת אל לבבך] ...then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you. ...Even if you are exiled to the ends of the world, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you back" (Deut 30:1-4; cf. 4:27-31). But though eventual restoration is implicit in covenantal judgment, in Lamentations we encounter Judah in a state of liminal crisis, devoid of confidence in Yahweh's covenantal fidelity. Yes, the גבר of ch. 3 attempts to awaken hope by reciting traditional formulations of salvation oracles, wisdom traditions, and others, but these efforts at theodicy dissolve. I only wish to caution here that we should not read covenantal confidence into Lamentations simply because of canonical/textual affinities. And while it *is* the case that the original intentions of these three texts were unconcerned with morally evaluating the deity, my dialogic approach allows for passive double voicing: the text may be established as in fact commenting about the morality of the deity for the contemporary reader, necessarily uniting the text into larger theological dialogues.[132]

Ezekiel 20:25-26 is undoubtedly the most disturbing. Parallels are called forth between the cannibalism present throughout Lamentations. In Ezekiel itself, the dialogic interaction of the text with earlier traditions is clearly present, ironizing some of the earliest strands of tradition regarding the sacrificial cultus to the point of actual "horror" (√שׁמם).[133] It is highly unlikely the author had any

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[132] *Pace*, e.g., Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*, 192.

[133] See also Jer 7:21-22: "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. For in the day that I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.'"

interest in commenting on Yahweh's morality; the rhetorical focus was obviously on shocking the impious into penitence – and this to great effect!

The prophetic examples from Isaiah and Amos likely reflect the covenantal background of Deuteronomy and Joshua as well. Since the OT lacks a fully developed dualism and nearly everything must find its origin in Yahwistic monotheism, a fair number of earlier scholars saw some kind of theological reflection on monism here.[134] But most argue that questions of monism are not in view and exceed contextual likelihood. Lindström, to give but one example, draws a parallel between Isa 45:7 and Lam 3:38, rejecting the idea that either one evinces strains of Yahwistic monism.[135] So, the "evil" in Isaiah and Lamentations is not evil *per se*, but a particular, historical, and localized event of divine judgment; the same can easily be said of Amos 3:6b.[136]

While there is much merit to this approach and I do not wish to dismiss it wholesale, the occurrences in Isa 45:7 and Lam 3:38 connote more than merely localized judgment (though it does include that). I make this judgment regarding Isaiah due to the parallelism of light/peace and darkness/evil, and the vocabulary of divine creation (יצר√ ;ברא√ ;עשׂה√); this is even more pronounced in 1QIsaᵃ with the use of טוב instead of שׁלום. And in Lamentations, due to the coupling of creation terminology in 3:37-38. I fear the moral overtones of the terminology are often too diluted by (rightly) noting the localized, specific reference. In Isaiah, for Yahweh to "form," "create," and "make" such things as "peace" and "evil" is to reference a cosmological perspective on God's creative power. In other words, the concept of רע/חשׁך exists on the level of the created order (according to Isaiah), even though this metaphysical reality plays out in particular, immanent historical scenarios of divine judgment.

In Lamentations, we have another significant collocation of creation terminology, and the aetiology of הרעות והטוב are queried *in that context*. Yes, the primary reference is of course to Jerusalem's siege, a particular, historical event of divine judgment (הרעות). But this experience of

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[134] Cf. Löhr, Rudolph, Weiser, Kraus, Plöger, Hillers, Kaiser, Boecker, etc.

[135] Lindström, *God and the Origin of Evil*, 222.

[136] Renkema (*Lamentations*, 420-421) and Thomas (*Poetry and Theology*, 191-192) explicitly make this argument as well.

suffering carries with it significant theological baggage. When this God speaks, what he creates is טוב and only טוב. The overtones of divine creational utterances serve to underscore the theodic crisis overcoming the poet. Importantly, terms typically reserved for divine action are passively double-voiced in order to further ironize the tragic view playing out in the man's rationalizations. The intensity of the tragedy is so acute that the only way the poet can account for it is to adopt the language of divine creativity. Anything less would dilute the severity and cosmological scope of Judah's demise. Yahweh, the loving God of covenantal fidelity, has ostensibly turned in such fierce wrath against his people that a breach of covenant seems a terrifying possibility. "Look, Yahweh! Consider! Whom have you ever afflicted like this?" (Lam 2:20a). The scope of disaster is so vast for those residing in Judah, the violation so unthinkable (Lam 1:10; 4:12), that cosmological terminology is entirely proper. The world is ending before their very eyes – how could this not evoke theological reflection on Yahweh's nature and the ultimate source of such horror?

Renkema goes does a very different route than other interpreters. Using the unusual plural הרעות as a starting point, he claims the poet of Lam 3 intends a second meaning here. The combination of אמר√, עליון, יהוה, and (מ)פּי (מ) signals both God's creative speech and prophetic utterance. Renkema then brings attention to Jer 23:16: חזון לבם ידברו לא מפי יהוה "They speak the vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of Yahweh." Based strongly on his Kampen methodology, he creatively draws out the following intriguing connections:

> Once again we find ourselves in the context of 'false' prophecy which clearly reveals the connection with the concatenative parallel strophe 2:14 where חזה√ is also employed. The prophets of Jerusalem uttered hollow words, and it is clear that the plural הָרֵעוֹת [...] has this significance: מַשְׂאוֹת שָׁוְא וּמַדּוּחִים, the baseless but alluring prophecies of salvation uttered by the prophets of Jerusalem which brought even the גֶּבֶר nothing but [...] poison, hardship and bitterness.[137]

What are we to make of this? Lam 4:13 does note, after all, that Jerusalem's fall was "due to the sins of her prophets" (מחטאת נביאיה). That the community engaged in "probing questions [...] with regard to

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[137] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 422.

the oracles of those prophets which were to be heard in Jerusalem" is undoubtedly true.[138] Renkema finds these potential allusions to be a satisfactory answer to the aetiological questions posed in 3:37-38. So, who spoke that this should happen? "Such misleading and evil-inducing words could not have come from the mouth of the Most High," thinks Renkema. "They originated in the hearts of these particular prophets. The only true prophetic word, spoken at YHWH's command, is ultimately good and brings about good."[139] Though I agree with his theological trajectory, I remain unconvinced textually and rhetorically. It is highly unlikely that readers would be expected to engage in such exegetical gymnastics in order to "properly" understand Lam 3:38. In making the jump from Lam 3:38 → Lam 2:14 → Jer 23:16 as the basis for הרעות's "true" referent, I fear Renkema leans too heavily on the supposed pragmatic force of the Kampen methodology, straining plausibility to the breaking point. I am not aware of any interpreters who have followed his route.

Both Gordis and Ehrlich find the Hebrew of 3:38 impossibly corrupt and emend the text to read הָרַע אֶת הַטּוֹב. Ehrlich then translates the whole line as, "Aus dem Munde des Höchsten kann nicht kommen der Befehl, den Frommen ein Leid anzutun" ("Out of the mouth of the Most High can not come the command to inflict suffering on the righteous man").[140] This captures the sense of the line quite well, but I am not persuaded this is necessary as there is no text critical foundation for emendation. Coupled with the observations above regarding cosmological overtones in 3:37-38, there is a much simpler explanation for the unusual plural הרעות paired with the 3f sg. תצא: the text remains acceptable as it stands if we understand הרעות as a *pluralis intensivus* – that is, "evil itself."[141] So, while Lam 3:38 very likely alludes to the covenantal curses of Deut 28-30, it has equally in view Yahweh's relationship to "evil itself." After all, Yahweh is the one who set up the curses in

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[138] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 422-423.

[139] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 423.

[140] Ehrlich, *Randglossen*, 44. To support rendering הטוב as "the righteous man" – and so the object of the (emended) verb sequence תֵּצֵא הָרֵעַ – he refers to the common usage in the Mishnah as a name for the pious.

[141] GKC §124a-e. Renkema (*Lamentations*, 422) accepts this as a plausible explanation, but prefers the allusion to false prophecy (viz., "evil words"). Driver has suggested that the disagreement with the singular והטוב results from a misunderstanding of a simple abbreviation – viz., והטובות = הטוב – and the ending was meant to be supplied by the reader. See Driver, "Abbreviations in the Massoretic Text," *Textus*, in *Annual of the Hebrew University Bible Project*, ed. C. Rabin (vol. I; Jerusalem: 1960), 112-115.

Deuteronomy in the first place! Undoubtedly, the plural remains strange to the ear. But drawing on Dobbs-Allsopp's earlier observations, I suggest that here we encounter a straining of poetic syntax that mirrors the strain of theodic dissolution. As the man's received theodicy unravels further and further, the syntax unfurls along with him. Furthermore, if the writers of Lam 3 wanted to *clearly* ask a rhetorical question in v. 38, they could have easily done so. A number of different options are possible while still employing the מ–acrostic, but the most obvious would have been something similar to what we find in Zeph 1:12:

Zephaniah 1:12	Hypothetical Rendering of Lamentations 3:38[142]
לֹא־יֵיטִיב יְהוָה וְלֹא יָרֵעַ	מפי עליון לא תצא הרעות ולֹא הטוב

Karl Budde, on the other hand, insists that "der verneinte Satz muss als rhetorische Frage gefasst werden." He continues, proposing that, "Deutlicher wäre die einfache Aussage ohne לֹא. Vielleicht ist dies aus dem vorigen eingedrungen, vielleicht aus Scheu vor der kühnen Aussage hinzugefügt."[143] The presence of לֹא is very weak grounds on which to base this objection, and the texts he cites to support his assertion (Amos 3:6; Jer 45:7) offer little to no help in this regard. Syntactically, the negated proposition operates quite naturally as a nominative statement, and given the גבר's route thus far, we should not be surprised to encounter "a bold statement" (*kühnen Aussage*), and even less should we expect the גבר to succumb to fear of heresy. Budde and those who follow his route of analysis fail to perceive the rhetorical flow of the גבר's theodic speculation.

    Similar to 3:37, it is relevant but not determinative to note MT vocalization. The Masoretes rightly placed a *zaqef qaton* over תצא, conceptually dividing the second stitch. Given that תצא is clearly a Qal impf. 3f sg., this could provide support for reading the second stitch as a disjunctive pair: "From the mouth of the most high [*evil*] *does not come* but good" (reading תצא as proleptically engaging הרעות as its primary referent). The other option, given the *zaqef qaton*, is to read the second stitch as a conjunctive pair. This has some difficulties, though, as already noted above. Again, one cannot put

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[142] Many other options would have been available to clearly indicate a query with a copulative pair in the second stitch: מִפִּי עֶלְיוֹן לֹא תֵצֵא גַּם־הָרָעוֹת וְהַטּוֹב; or מִפִּי עֶלְיוֹן לֹא תֵצֵא גַּם־הָרָעוֹת גַּם־הַטּוֹב; or מִפִּי עֶלְיוֹן יַחְדָּו לֹא תֵצֵא הָרָעוֹת וְהַטּוֹב; or מָה תֵצֵא מִפִּי עֶלְיוֹן אִם־לֹא הָרָעוֹת וְהַטּוֹב; or מִפִּי עֶלְיוֹן לֹא תֵצֵא גַּם־הָרָעוֹת עִם־הַטּוֹב; etc.

[143] *Die Kalgelieder*, in Karl Budde *et al.*, *Die fünf Megillot*, (KHC, 17; Freiburg, Leipzig and Tübingen, 1898), 96.

much too much interpretive weight on the Masoretic accents, but we at least see that the scribes read the second stitch of this verse as constituting a pair in correlation with תצא.[144] Whether the pair is conjunctive or disjunctive, and whether we are to read an implied interrogative, must be decided through other means as already demonstrated. But given the available data, I believe the disjunctive reading to be most compelling.

In his taxonomy of enjambment in Lamentations, Dobbs-Allsopp classifies 3:38 as an example of "subject enjambment."[145] Read in this way, we may see the 3f sg. תצא as correlating with the 3f sg. ותהי, enveloping הרעות והטוב through subject enjambment (very similar to the Masoretic notations). This allows the conceptual possibility of translating 3:37-38 like this (removing the enjambed subjects): "Who spoke that this should happen? Adonai did not command it! [These things that happened] do not come forth from the mouth of the Most High!" הרעות והטוב are then the enjambed subjects of ותהי and תצא, those things which Adonai did not command and which do not come from His mouth. It is at this point that most interpreters render the phrases as rhetorical questions, but syntactically I find this move to be without much warrant and based solely on theological presuppositions.

Bringing our work on vv. 37-38 together, we may now lay out three possible (paraphrased) options for interpretation.[146] 3:37-38 in the MT is below, with the interpretive options following:

<div dir="rtl">

מי זה אמר ותהי
אדני לא צוה
מפי עליון לא תצא
הרעות והטוב

</div>

(i)   Who did this? Not Yahweh. From him does not come evil (like this situation) but good.
(ii) Who did this? Yahweh. However, from Yahweh comes not evil but good (implied: so this situation must really be good not evil).
(iii) Who did this? Yahweh. Do not both evil and good come from Yahweh? (implied: yes, both come from Yahweh)

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[144] The feminine form can be used to suggest a collective (GKC §145k).
[145] "Sometimes the *rejet* contains a subject in Lamentations, though not frequently, probably owing to the fact that subjects are always indexed on the verb and thus are never required syntactically. This, too, suggests that subject enjambment remains at the softer end of the continuum" (Dobbs-Allsopp, "The Enjambing Line," 226).
[146] Shadowing Robin Parry's lucid approach here.

It should be obvious by now that I prefer option (i). Option (ii) is recently supported by the CEB, but it seems highly unlikely that any speaker in Lamentations (even the גבר) would describe their suffering as "good." The paraenesis in 3:25-30 does not describe the suffering itself as "good," but how certain responses to suffering are "good" (= "appropriate"). Option (iii) is, of course, traditionally the most popular. On this view, Yahweh is the root cause of the present crisis because *all* things – both good and evil – come from his "mouth," or "by his command." If the man's sapiential advice follows the logic put forth by traditional interpretation, it makes good sense to take 3:37-38 as containing rhetorical questions. Dobbs-Allsopp mixes up the progression of thought in this section, resulting in faulty exegesis: "God is in complete control and all powerful. What God says, God does (3:37) [...] and both good and evil are attributable to God (3:38). Therefore why should one complain about just punishment for sin (3:39)? Rather, one should bear one's suffering quietly (3:28-30) and wait for God's deliverance (3:25-27). [...] Such suffering should be passively accepted."[147] But as I have attempted to demonstrate thus far, we should read the man's logic in quite a different way, as a progressive crisis of theodicy.

So, ultimately, if interpreters insist on reading 3:38 as a rhetorical question, they must overcome several difficulties: (1) the obvious and simplest reading of the Hebrew clause is a nominative statement; (2) Origen quotes the verse three different ways, each supporting a statement claiming only good comes from the Lord, indicating a hypothetical Hebrew *Vorlage* or at least an ancient reading tradition explicitly reading 3:38 nominatively; (3) the Greek tradition preserves a sequence in 3:36b-38 that quite plausibly fits with my reading, and in *scriptura continua* could have been Origen's source; (4) *Tg. Lam.*, *Lam. Rab.*, Ibn Ezra, and Kara all read the passage as a statement; (5) this reading, taken along with the proposed translation of 3:37, provides a smoother flow from 3:36b, allowing the Hebrew to stand in all three verses without emendation or tortured syntax; (6) more explicit syntactical options were available to the poets if they wanted to indicate a rhetorical question with a conjunctive pair in the second stitch. In my judgment, the traditional rendering does not succeed in sufficiently addressing these issues and should be rejected.

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

Now we reach 3:39, which reads מה יתאונן אדם חי גבר על חטאו. It is difficult to understand whether the entire phrase is a rhetorical question or if the second stitch (גבר על חטאו) contains an answer. Also unclear is the *Kethib/Qere* situation. There seem to be two basic choices:

(a) *One rhetorical question.* So with the NRSV: "Why should any who draw breath complain about the punishment of their sins?"

(b) *A rhetorical question with an answer.* Consider Budde: "What *should* the living man complain about? [Answer:] Each about his sins!"[148]

Several interpretive issues in 3:39 deserve attention, notably (i) What is the meaning of יתאונן? (ii) What is חי modifying, and how should we understand it? (iv) Why is the term גבר (seen in 3:1, 27, 35) suddenly reintroduced, and does it correlate with אדם? (v) Is the entire line one (rhetorical?) question, or does the second stitch provide an answer? (vi) What should we make of the mention of חטא? Rather than address these issues sequentially, I will weave in and out of each in the course of the analysis.

Traditional interpretations have intuited divine punishment within the terminology of חטא and make the (ostensibly) implicit explicit. Consider, for instance, the NRSV's rendering: "Why should any who draw breath complain about the punishment of their sins?"[149] The implication of this reading, as Berlin observes, seems to be "that it is better to be alive, even with suffering, than to be dead [...] God is showing mercy by keeping a person alive."[150] I do not believe it would necessarily mitigate this view, but if we accept this interpretation it is worth noting the significant dialogic tension raised with Lam 4:9: "Happier were those pierced by the sword than those pierced by hunger, whose life drains away, deprived of the produce of the field!"

At first glance, it would seem that 3:39 contradicts the rhetorical progression for which I have been arguing. With the first and only explicit reference to sin (חטא) in Lam 3, is it possible to maintain the doubt of 3:37-38 regarding Yahweh's direct causality? It would seem that the vocabulary of חטא

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[148] "Was soll der lebende Mensch betrauern? [Anwort:] Jeder über seine Sünden!" (Budde, *Die Kalgelieder*, 96).

[149] Those who produce a similar translation include Gesenius, Gordis, Meek, Hillers, Provan, Berlin, House, Salters, and Parry.

[150] Berlin, *Lamentations*, 95.

regularly assumes negative divine intervention (i.e., punishment), and the few other occurrences in Lamentations support this (Lam 1:8; 5:7, 16). This is perhaps made even more explicit with the vocabulary of "transgression" (פשׁע√; Lam 1:5, 14, 22; 3:42) and "rebellion" (מרה√; Lam 1:18, 20; 3:42). That the poets of Lamentations periodically acknowledge their sin-guilt is undeniable. What then to make of 3:39?

I think we are best served by first discerning the meaning of the rare verb יתאונן, typically translated "complain." אנן√ only occurs twice in the Hebrew Bible – here and Num 11:1 – and both times in the Hithpoel. Numbers 11:1 reads: ויהי העם כמתאננים רע באזני יהוה "And then the people began *complaining* bitterly in the hearing of Yahweh..."[151] In the context of Numbers 10-21 – the block of wilderness wandering material in which we find אנן – any mention of suffering is clearly depicted as punishment for the people's sin. Numbers 11:1 fits this motif, as the "complaining" in question provokes divine anger, causing Moses to intercede for the people and relieve God's wrath. Presumably, then, such "complaining" was on some level sinful.[152] Given the rarity of the verb אנן, it is possible that Lam 3:39 is exploiting an allusion to the block of material in Numbers, specifically Num 11:1. The precise nature of that allusion, though, or whether it is even present, is unclear and should not be stressed. It is just as likely that a shared lexical stock accounts for the instance, and the word's rarity merely due to the historical chance of which documents we happen to possess. Nevertheless, it's often thought that the logic behind Lam 3:39 is synonymous to that of Num 11:1. As Thomas comments, "the main concern here is to admonish the people to *avoid* complaining, as Yhwh's punishment was *justified* and *predicted*, as on display in Deut. 30.15."[153] In other words, the poet asks, "Why should a survivor complain?" incredulously, the implication being that Yahweh laid out a path of life and a path of death – they chose the latter, so they should stop complaining about their own actions and accept their suffering as justly deserved (cf. *Lam. Rab.* 3:38). So Vermigli:

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[151] Cf. also Sir 41:2 (אישׁ אננים).

[152] See Brevard Childs, *Exodus* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 258-274, who notes the contrast with pre-Sinai wilderness wandering pericopes in Exod 15-18, where suffering is presented as an opportunity for Yahweh to deliver rather than express anger.

[153] Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*, 193 (his italics).

"WHY MURMURS A LIVING HUMAN BEING (namely, "against God")? Foolishly they act thus, in complaining about his goodness. A MAN AGAINST HIS SINS. That is, he murmurs not against the Lord. Whatever adversity, whatever sorrow, or whatever troubles they suffer, they owe it all to their crimes, not to divine goodness."[154]

This is certainly reasonable, but whether or not connotations of direct punishment are meant here is in my view inconclusive. More evidence is needed to justify a strict analogical parallel, and a close reading yields different conclusions than traditionally supposed.

As for how we should translate יתאונן, there are a few options. Calvin, for instance, shows an awareness of several different translations – "lie," "murmur," "harden (one's self)" – but rejects them all in favor of "weary (one's self)."[155] *Tg. Lam.* seems to have had difficulty with the verb, apparently deriving יתאונן not from √אנן but from אוֹן, "wealth": "What profit shall a person find *who sins all the days of his* life, a *wicked* man for his sins?" (cf. Ibn Ezra). But LXX, Vulgate, *Lam. Rab.*, *b. Qidd.* 80b, and *Leqaḥ Tob* all presuppose the meaning "complain," and I follow this route. I do *not*, however, share in the common assumption that overtones of divine punishment are necessarily present.

A major interpretive question is whether 3:39 constitutes one rhetorical question, or a question *and* an answer. The former is the traditional approach, and for the latter consider again Budde's translation: "What *should* the living man complain about? Each about his sins!"[156] Rashi, Kara, and *Lam. Rab.* seem to have taken the verse to be a question plus an answer as well. In *Lam. Rab.*, for instance, each stitch is interpreted separately. So, the first comment on "Why should a living man complain?" is, "It is enough that he lives!" R. Huna is quoted, "Let him stand up bravely, acknowledge his sins, and not complain." Then R. Berekhiah is quoted, "Why should someone complain against the

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[154] Vermigli, *Commentary*, 136. It is curious that Vermigli refers to divine "goodness" rather than something like divine "wrath," "severity," "punishment," etc. But this does cohere with his insistence that Jerusalem's punishment is in fact an expression of divine goodness (i.e., covenant faithfulness/justice).

[155] Calvin, *Commentaries*, 431.

[156] Cf. JPS; NJPS; Westermann, *Die Klagelieder*, 163; Rudolph, *Die Klagelieder*, 232; Gottlieb, *A Study on the Text*, 52; O. Kaiser, *Klagelieder*, in H. Ringgren *et al.*, *Sprüche, Prediger, Das Hohe Lied, Klagelieder, Das Buch Esther* (ATD, 16; 3ʳᵈ edn; Göttingen, 1981), 345; and G. R. Driver, "Hebrew Notes on 'Song of Songs' and 'Lamentations'," in W. Baumgartner, O. Eissfeldt, K. Elliger, and L. Rost (eds.), *Festschrift Alfred Bertholet* (Tübingen, 1950), 140.

Eternal? If someone wants to complain, let it be about his sins."[157] Luther also interpreted the structure in this way: "Wie murren denn die Leute im Leben also? Ein jeglicher murre wider seine Sünde!"

The sequence גבר חי אדם has struck many interpreters as odd: the phrase אדם חי is a *hapax*; furthermore, what is חי modifying, and why the inclusion of גבר? Up to this point, it would seem that the גבר has been speaking (Lam 3:1). Is he speaking of himself in the third person now? This seems to occur in 3:27. Or has another voice taken over at an unknown point during the paraenesis? It's possible the entire paraenesis is another voice – a didactic voice – and the גבר plus the community re-enter at 3:40ff. But given that we have no vocal cues to suggest otherwise, it remains unclear. The present study assumes the same speaker throughout Lam 3, and that he is simply enveloped in the short communal section of 3:40-47. The most common choice is to simply see גבר in poetic parallelism with אדם חי. It's also possible that the indefinite גבר ("*a* man") is meant to differentiate from הגבר ("*the* man"), so that the latter is advising how "*a*" גבר is meant to act.

Still, some have felt that the Hebrew is too corrupt and resort to emendation. Driver, for example, suggests that a י has dropped out due to haplography and that the text should be restored with a jussive verb: יִגְבַּר עַל חֲטָאָיו "let him be master of his sins."[158] Similarly, Rudolph, Haller, and *BHS* suggest that יהי be read for חי, and revocalize גְּבַר (cf. Gen 27:29), yielding, "Let him become master over his sins."[159] Westermann translates, "Let us all master our own sins."[160] Dahood presents the least invasive and most promising option, taking חי to be the object of complaint: "With עליון in the preceding verse it forms a composite divine title whose roots are also found in the Samaria Ostraca personal name *yhw'ly*, as well as in the parallel cola of Pss 30.4 and 71.20..."[161] Repointing גֶּבֶר עֹל, he translates, "Why does a man complain about the Living God, if the malice [viz., "yoke"] of his sins runs its course

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[157] See the first stitch of Dahood's emendation below.

[158] Driver, "Hebrew Notes," 140.

[159] Rudolph, "Der Text der Klagelieder," 113; Haller, "Die Klagelieder," 104; *BHS* critical apparatus.

[160] Westermann, *Lamentations*, 163.

[161] Dahood, "New Readings," 187.

[גֶּבֶר]?" Consider also the similar gloss by R. Berekhiah in *Lam. Rab.* 3:38: "Why should someone complain *against the Eternal?*" If we repoint with one of the above suggestions, it is highly likely that גֶּבֶר/גְּבַר is exploiting an effective wordplay with גֶּבֶר, and even echoing עֹל ("yoke") from 3:27. Interpreting חי as the object of the verse has textual support in the constructions אל חי and אלהים חי (e.g., Josh 3:10; 2 Kgs 19:4; Isa 37:4; Hos 2:1; Pss 42:3, 84:3). Also intriguing is Dan 12:7: "And he swore by the One Who Lives Forever" (וישבע בחי העולם). חי is undoubtedly capable of functioning by itself nominally, though we only have instances of human referents (e.g., כל חי in Ps 143:2; cf. Ps 145:16; Job 12:10, 21, 30:23).

In different ways these are all attractive proposals, but both rhetorically and theologically I am inclined to Dahood's suggestion. Most interpreters maintain that the MT remains intelligible as it stands if one simply allows אדם חי to mean, "a living man." *Tg. Lam.* takes the phrase to mean, "a man, while he is alive," and paraphrases חי into "all the days of his life." Or perhaps, as Renkema suggests, "a survivor."[162] LXX supports traditional renderings with ἄνθρωπος ζῶν ἀνὴρ περὶ[163] τῆς ἁμαρτίας αὐτοῦ. If we can interpret the MT text as it stands, then *lectio difficilior potior*, yes? I certainly allow the possibility of the MT's intelligibility and offer it as a live option that fits with my argument. But I contend that, due to effective wordplay and rhetorical flow from 3:37-38, Dahood's emendation does not violate the consonantal text and produces a preferable reading and should therefore be adopted.

יתאונן verbally determines the second stitch. We then immediately come to the question of חֶטְאוֹ: what does it mean in this instance? Matters are further complicated by the *Kethib/Qere* situation – the former חֶטְאוֹ, the latter חֲטָאָיו.[164] I prefer the *Kethib* and translate "his sin(-fate)." That is, the consequences of sins, the fate from which he is suffering due to sin. I follow Renkema here and insist that "the authors are not speaking here of the multitude of the people's sins but of the single fate which is their consequence, of the affliction and misfortune which befall a human person as a result of

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[162] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 423.
[163] Some MSS. παρα or επι.
[164] LXX reads with *Kethib*: τῆς ἁμαρτίας αὐτοῦ.

his or her sin (or that of others)."[165] This is in contrast to sins *per se*, as in complaining against oneself in a penitential sense, which seems to be supported by the *Qere* חֲטָאָיו. This is adopted, as we have seen, by R. Berekhiah in *Lam. Rab.*, but really makes little sense. How would one *complain* about one's own sins? To whom would one complain? It's important to note that √אנן is, by definition, directed toward *another*, and here the implied object of complaint is עליון, or more likely in my view, חי as a proper noun. So, what *should* a survivor complain about? Certainly not the Most High! After all, "doesn't Adonai see all this?" (3:36b). "He did not command this" (3:37), and "from his mouth does not come evil but good" (3:38) – how then could he be responsible? The logic here leads the man to conclude that it is inappropriate to complain against Yahweh, for Yahweh is not to blame. The preceding meditation on divine goodness precludes the deity's involvement in the present evil. In the brief extant fragment in Origen's commentary related to 3:39, he builds on his previous argumentation in which he denies God's direct causality. The verse refers, he says, "to those who grumble in vain against the Creator as *the cause*" (τὴν αἰτίαν; Fragment 80). Such grumbling is in vain precisely because each person's sin is to blame, says Origen, and therefore we should not accuse God (cf. Fragment 79, quoted above).

Fundamental to my argument here is the plausibility of whether there can be *consequences for sin apart from divine punishment.* I have in mind here both the possibility of innocent suffering (suffering the consequences of *someone else's* sin) and the possibility of a sin-act-consequence relationship free of primary causality (viz., punishment) by the deity. If this sounds suspiciously anachronistic, that need not be the case. At least a nascent conception of non-retributive consequences for sin is present in Hebrew thought,[166] and key for my proposal is to underscore the *liminal nature* of Judah's theodic imagination. Traumatized as it was by the Babylonian onslaught, systems of theodicy were pushed to their breaking points, and in my reading we witness the pathos of this liminality in Lamentations 3. Sin can be perpetrated unconsciously, and the results of sin can often overcome one via others. This is

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[165] Renkema, *Lamentations*, 424-425.
[166] Klaus Koch's now famous essay ("Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?") undoubtedly overstates the issue, but his core observations still stand. For Koch's original essay, see *ZTK* 52 (1955): 1-42. See also Patrick D. Miller, *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets* (SBLMS, 27; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1982).

undoubtedly due to the robust concepts of "clean/unclean" and "honor/shame" regarding sin in the Hebrew worldview, which includes the belief that sin literally "infects" the community (consider Achan in Josh 7).[167] So, חטא may very well refer to the fate of someone affected by the sins of others – and this is undoubtedly an appropriate thing about which to complain, where the strain between communal and individual guilt becomes intolerable. That such a tragic and unjust situation exists in Lamentations is clearly approached in at least three places:

> 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 misleading. (Lam 2:14)

> It was for the sins of her prophets
> > and the iniquities of her priests,
> who shed the blood of the righteous
> > in the midst of her. (Lam 4:13)

> Our ancestors sinned; they are no more,
> > and we bear their iniquities. (Lam 5:7)

For a people whose God declared to them, "A child shall not suffer for the iniquity of a parent, nor a parent suffer for the iniquity of a child" (Ezek 18:20; cf. Deut 5:9, 24:16), this is an unbearable tension in divine character. Here we may deeply empathize with the people's protest in Num 16:22: "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one person sin and you become angry with the whole congregation?"[168] The גבר's paraenesis has reached a new level of dissolution here, where the advised silence of 3:26 has been replaced by a renegotiation of complaint: the man may indeed rage as he did in 3:1-21, *but not against Yahweh*. If one maintains the MT, then he should instead rage על־חטאו, "against his sin-fate." That is, against the communal sins that have incurred this tragic act-consequence sequence in Jerusalem, against those who have led Judah into such a disastrous

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[167] For a good discussion of these conceptions in a theodic key, see M. M. Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, 86-128.

[168] Cf. Gen 20:9; Exod 32:21; Josh 7:11, 20.

circumstance. In my preferred reading, the entire line subverts complaint against Yahweh: "Why should a man complain against the Living God when the yoke of his sin-fate overwhelms?" Yahweh has been further removed from causality, and the traditional theodicy's instability underscored. What is left to justify if Yahweh did not in fact do this?

e. The גבר *Calls for Repentance, Loses Theodic Confidence, and Leads a Lament* (*3:40-54*)

The נ–strophe contains what I see to be the climax of Lam 3's attempt at theodicy, but also the abrupt shift to its ultimate collapse:

<div dir="rtl">

נחשׂפה דרכינו ונחקרה ונשׁובה עד־יהוה
נשׂא לבבנו אל־כפים אל־אל בשׁמים
נחנו פשׁענו ומרינו אתה לא סלחת

</div>

Berlin correctly perceives this section to be "the theological and poetic turning point," for "despite the valiant attempt at theodicy, reason cannot conquer all."[169] All three lines suddenly bring in a plural voice, clearly the voice of the community. It is quite possible, and is the case in my view, that the גבר continues as the main voice and speaks representatively for his community (this is further supported by the transition back to singular in 3:46-48). But a shift in tone is nonetheless detectable. A transition begins from Wisdom discourse to a lament or penitential psalm, and in v. 42b God is addressed directly as "you" instead of being referred to as "he."

The opening of this strophe links nicely with the logic put forth in 3:37-39: Yahweh is not responsible for the present situation, though sin is undoubtedly the cause (and possibly the object of complaint). But the precise nature of this sin remains unclear, and this calls for self-examination: "Let us examine and explore our ways, and let us return to Yahweh."[170] This lines up with the ambiguity surrounding the precise nature of Jerusalem's sin(s) that dominates Lamentations. We never actually know what exactly the people are guilty of. In 3:41, lifting one's heart and hands to God represents an act of religious dedication and prayerful sincerity (e.g., Ps 28:2). Lamentations 3:42 builds upon the

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[169] Berlin, *Lamentations*, 95.
[170] The verbs "test" and "examine" occur frequently in Wisdom literature (e.g., Job 5:27; 28:3, 27; Prov 2:4; 20:27; Sir 13:11; 42:18).

language of sin in 3:39, compounding the force of the corporate confession: "We have transgressed [פשׁע√] and rebelled [מרה√]."

Note the ambivalence with דרך vocabulary, where previously the גבר complained that Yahweh had "walled of my ways" (3:9a; גדר דרכי), and "forced me off my ways" (3:11a; דרכי סורר). This dialogical ambivalence highlights the strain in theodic imagination, where the poet is able to conceive of "examining and exploring our ways" in order to "return to Yahweh" (3:40), right on the heels of a dissolved theodic discourse where Yahweh's direct causality has been seriously doubted. By 3:40, Yahweh is no longer the one who "walled off" and "forced me off my ways," but the one from whom no evil comes – therefore why should one complain against Yahweh? (And if the MT is to be maintained, complain about your own sin-fate!) That is, our own sinful actions were the cause of us perverting our "ways," not Yahweh's capricious manipulation and injustice. *We* cut ourselves off from Yahweh and must return, rather than Yahweh cutting himself off from us and then we implore the deity to return. This is the remarkable conclusion reached by the גבר by 3:40-42a, and I contend that 3:31-42a in particular constitutes an exceptional moment in Israel/Judah's theodic imagination, a genuine theological *novum*, however liminal. This is sin-act-consequence with a genuine need for repentance but devoid of a deity's violent retribution. By 3:42a, the גבר has followed his meditations on divine goodness to their logical conclusion, and this looks like a deity without any admixture of good and evil, a Yahweh who compassionately looks on the horrendous fate of his people and calls them back from the ways that led them into horror in the first place.

And yet, as though in mid-thought, the entire theodic attempt is jarringly aborted as anger overcomes the poet: "*We*, we transgressed and were rebellious...but *you!* You have not forgiven! You covered yourself in anger and pursued us; you slaughtered without mercy... (3:42-43). There is no coordination between the first and second stitches of 3:42, and I have attempted in my translation to convey the force of the Hebrew parataxis with the addition of the independent personal pronouns נחנו and אתה. I agree with Berlin's assessment: "As the poet struggles to come to terms with the

tragedy, his forbearance and hope turn to anger and despair; and the language of wisdom is overwhelmed by the language of lament. [...] The old theology has proved to be false."[171]

Some object to this reading, most recently Parry who asserts, "This is not a complaint that God has ignored Judah's repentance."[172] There is undoubtedly an uncomfortable level of theodic tension in this verse, and several older translations have felt the need to relieve some of that tension. Jerome, for instance, makes explicit the reason for God not forgiving by supplying a coordinating particle: "Nos inique egimus, et ad iracundiam provocavimus; *idcirco* tu inexorabilis es." So also Luther: "...darum hast du nicht vergeben." *Tg. Lam.* clearly felt uneasy with the possibility of divine caprice, so adds that it is humans' lack of repentance that prevents divine forgiveness: "We rebelled, we have been disobedient, *and because we did not return in repentance to you*, you have not forgiven." Ibn Ezra takes a similar approach in his comments: "Israel confesses that they did not return to God, therefore he did not forgive."[173] See also LXX: καὶ οὐχ ἱλάσθης "...and you were not appeased."

But most interpret 3:42 as containing an accusation. Consider Kara: "We have done what belongs to us...but you did not do what belongs to you." Similarly, *Lam. Rab.*: "*We have been disobedient and have rebelled*, which is in accord with our nature. *You have not forgiven.* Is that in accord with your nature?"[174] We should not miss the force of disillusionment here. The ancient assumption that repentance should bring about divine compassion and forgiveness was strong and widespread (e.g., Ps 32:5). The emphasis on the personal pronouns "we" and "you" set up a striking contrast: "*We* have confessed our transgressions, but *you* have not forgiven." A fracture in the relationship has been disclosed, and the climax of theodic confidence reached through 3:22-42a collapses.

All conviction in Yahweh's goodness is apparently overtaken by the harsh reality that surrounds the poet, and divine benevolence lays shattered beneath an unforgiving, violent deity. Quickly and gratingly the reader is led back into sporadic fragments of frenzied lament, some of the most disturbing in the poem (cf. Ps 89). The ס–strophe reverts back to God as the main adversary.

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[171] Berlin, *Lamentations*, 95, 96.

[172] Parry, *Lamentations*, 116.

[173] See also Calvin and Vermigli.

[174] In the OT, the verb סלח is used only of God, never of humans forgiving one another. See Pss 86:5; 103:3; 130:4, where forgiveness is noted as a divine characteristic.

Repetition with the גבר's initial complaint is present: "anger" (3:43; cf. 3:1); "no prayer can pass" (3:44; cf. 3:8); "made us filth and rubbish" (3:45; cf. 3:14). Notice also the echoes of 2:1-8: "anger" (cf. 2:1a, c, 2b, 3a, 6c); "slaughter without mercy" (cf. 2:2a, 17b, 21c). The next two strophes (3:46-51) shift the focus once again, this time to what their enemies have done. Notably, the singular voice re-enters in 3:48: "My eyes flow with streams of water over the destruction of the daughter of my people." In the next and final section, despair turns into desperation (3:55-63) and then into angry cries for vengeance (3:64-66).

f. The גבר Despairs, Prays for Deliverance, and Calls for Vengeance (3:55-66)

There has been significant disagreement on whether the גבר returns to a posture of faith here and recalls either past or present salvific deeds, or whether the man is instead crying out for such deliverance precisely because it has not been experienced yet. The question turns on whether the perfect verbs in 3:55-63 should be translated as simple past or precative perfects. At the level of content, I will not spend as much time on this final section of Lam 3. But establishing the precative perfects as a compelling option is directly related to the rhetorical structure for which I am arguing. In the end, this will result in a threefold movement in Lam 3, a rising and falling action: (i) 3:1-21 *Complaint*; (ii) 3:22-42a *Theodicy*; (iii) 3:42b-66 *Complaint/Petition*.[175] Therefore, I will focus briefly on the syntax in 3:55-66 and demonstrate how its content links with the rest of Lam 3.

If one wishes to translate the verbs as simple past perfects, this raises the further question of whether such deliverance is chronologically prior or subsequent to 3:1-54. In other words, is the poet claiming Yahweh has in fact delivered him from the torment described in 3:1-54? Or is it rather the case that the poet is recounting past experiences of deliverance in order to strengthen present faith? This approach also raises the question whether the poet in 3:55-66 is distinct from the previous

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[175] It should be noted that Ps 74 has a similar threefold structure: (i) 74:1-11 *Complaint*; (ii) 74:12-17 *Praise/Retrospect*; (iii) 74:18-23 *Petition*. This Psalm was likely composed around 582 BCE. See Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, who rightly notes the rhetorical function of the praise/retrospect in Ps 74: "In contrast to the indictment, this retrospect holds up before God the blatant contradiction between God's actions in the past and in the present" (148; cf. 143-149).

speaker(s). Those who translate the verbs as simple past perfects include Kraus, Weiser, Kaiser, Huey, O'Connor, and recently Parry.[176] Bracke translates the verbs as simple past perfects but notes the precative view as plausible.[177] LXX and most modern English translations also translate as simple past tense. *Tg. Lam.* does so as well, but glosses 3:56 as, "My prayer you received *at that time*, so do not cover your ear *now, in order not to receive my prayer*, to give me respite because of my plea." But consider the NRSV:

> *I called* on your name, O Lord,
>   from the depths of the pit;
> *You heard* my plea, "Do not close your ear
>   to my cry for help, but give me relief!"
> *You came near* when I called on you;
>   *You said*, "Do not fear!" (etc.)

A minority alternative is to translate in the present tense.[178] The more popular view among recent interpretive trends supports reading precative perfects, where the verbs express a desire or request not unlike the imperative. Influential works that argue for this view include Gordis, Provan, Hillers, Berlin, Dobbs-Allsopp, and most recently Thomas.[179] I adopt this view and translate accordingly:

> *I call* on your name, Yahweh,
>   from the deepest pit:
> *Hear* my voice; don't shut your ear to
>   my need for relief, to my call for help!
> *Draw near* on the day that I call to you;
>   say, "Do not fear"! (etc.)

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[176] Kraus, *Klagelieder*, 53-59; Weiser, *Klagelieder*, 76-77, 87-91; Kaiser, *Klagelieder*, 349-351, 357-358; F.B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (NAC, 16; Nashville: B&H, 1993), 477-478; O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*, 55-56; Parry, *Lamentations*, 90-91, 120-126.

[177] Bracke, *Jeremiah 30-53 and Lamentations*, 224-225.

[178] So Renkema, *Lamentations*, 450; see *IBHS* §31.3.

[179] Gordis, *Song of Songs and Lamentations*, 170-171; *idem*, "Commentary on the Text of Lamentations (Part Two)," *JQR* 58 (1967): 26-27; Provan, *Lamentations*, 105-109; "Past, Present and Future," *passim*; Hillers, *Lamentations*, 117-119; Berlin, *Lamentations*, 83, 97; Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 126-128; Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*, 198-203.

Undoubtedly due to the considerable influence of Gesenius and Driver,[180] modern scholarship has been reticent to accept the notion of a precative perfect in Biblical Hebrew, even though it is attested in cognate languages.[181] Specifically within Lamentations, this is compounded in part by the suggestion that the verbs in question can be easily understood as simple past perfects. Underlying this opinion is the belief that there are *two speakers* here representing *two separate situations*: one who is in current distress (3:46-54), and one who recounts past suffering in which he has experienced Yahweh's deliverance (3:55-63). The latter then reintroduces a hopeful perspective in the poetry. But problems exist.

Iain Provan has presented the best case for precative perfects.[182] His main objection to the simple past tense view is the lack of obvious cues that would suggest a temporal shift. Traditionally, the supposed transition is thought to occur between v. 58 and v. 59. Provan raises two objections: First, "it is not a natural reading of the text to break it at this point, differentiating between 'You have taken up my cause' in v. 58 and 'You have seen the wrong done to me' in v. 59."[183] Second, Provan notes that in the thought world of ancient Israelites, for God to "see" is synonymous with God "acting." Therefore, if God has seen, it would be the same as saying God has acted to deliver. So, if the speaker actually believes Yahweh "has seen" his *current* suffering (3:59), it would follow that God has in fact rescued him from it. But this is obviously not the case, or else the man would not cry for God to "look" (הביטה Hiphil impv.; 3:63; cf. 3:50). Another difficulty is the presence of שָׁפְטָה (Qal impv.) in Lam 3:59. If someone has experienced actual deliverance – be it the גבר or another voice – then why does there remain a need for Yahweh to "judge" or "consider" the crisis? Wiesmann actually notes this awkwardness and attempts to resolve it by saying there is a past crisis spoken of by Jeremiah (Lam 3:52-58) to which Zion responds in Lam 3:59, that God has actually seen (3:59-61) but not yet full

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[180] GKC §106; S.R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of Tenses in Hebrew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3rd edn, 1874), §20.

[181] For references, see Provan, "Past, Present and Future," 165-166.

[182] Provan, "Past, Present and Future," 164-175.

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

delivered and therefore the crisis persists (3:64-66).[184] But the interweaving voices are not so simply unraveled, and we remain without any explicit cues to signal anything like Wiesmann's solution.

Second, the simple past tense approach lacks a convincing explanation for 3:56: קולי שמעת אל־תעלם אזנך לרוחתי לשועתי. Traditionally it is translated, "You heard (שמעת as a perfect) my voice. Do not shut (אל־תעלם in imperfect, jussive in meaning) your ear to my need for relief, to my call for help!" According to traditionalists, the second sentence occurs in a section about *past* deliverance, yet it occurs here as a plea for *present* deliverance. If we translate שמעת in the simple past, it strains the intelligibility of the entire sentence lest we assume the remaining lines to be a quotation from the man's past. A parallel situation occurs in 3:57a: קרבת יובם אקראך "You drew near (perfect) in the day I call (imperfect) to you."

Furthermore, if 3:55-63 represents actual deliverance, why does 3:64-66 return to a *present* description of enemy threat? Why then is Yahweh appealed to *again*, this time to destroy enemies who are obviously an enduring danger? Even if 3:55-63 is a hope-filled declaration of experienced deliverance, the final strophe ends ch. 3 on a destabilized note, undermining the previous confidence. Provan concludes that "only a future reference for the perfect verbs of vv. 56-61 really does them justice," and suggests that taking the perfects as requests (viz., precatives) removes all these difficulties.[185] As for the perfect verb "I call" (קראתי) in 3:55, we may simply translate statively: "I call/am calling."[186] Dobbs-Allsopp and Thomas point out the repetition of the term "pit" (בור) in 3:53 and 3:55, the only two occurrences in Lamentations: "In this way the ק-strophe is structurally related to the צ-strophe and introduces the reality of present distress in the span of Lam 3:56-66."[187] As for 3:55, Hillers and Provan note a similar structure in Ps 130:1-2:[188]

Out of the depths I call you, O Yahweh;	ממעמקים קראתיך יהוה
Adonai, hear my voice!	אדני שמעה בקולי
Let your ears be attentive to the sound	תהיינה אזניך קשבות לקול תחנוני

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[184] Wiesmann, *Die Klagelieder*, 197-198.

[185] Provan, "Past, Present and Future," 172.

[186] GBHS §3.2.1.(b).

[187] Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*, 201; cf. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 127.

[188] Hillers, *Lamentations*, 118.

of my supplications!

Paralleling Lam 3:55, קראתיך can be understood as a stative perfect and שמעה is a clear imperative. We may also point to examples of stative perfects in Pss 17:6, 88:9, 119:145-146, and 141:1. And as for Lam 3:56, Provan points to a similar construction in Ps 102:2-3 (Eng. = vv. 1-2):[189]

O Yahweh, hear my prayer, let my cry for help come to you;	יהוה שמעה תפלתי ושועתי אליך תבוא
Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress.	אל־תסתר פניך ממני ביום צר לי
Incline your ear to me in the day I call – answer me swiftly!	הטה־אלי אזנך ביום אקרא מהר ענני

Like Lam 3:56, this section of Ps 102 has a similar alternation of moods between imperatives and imperfects. These Psalmic parallels suggest plausible evidence for seeing the perfects in Lam 3:55-62 as precatives depicting a situation of *present* distress from which the speaker demands rescue that has *not yet occurred.*

Parry objects on the grounds that unless there is a strong reason to do so, we should appreciate the rarity of precative perfects and prefer a simple past translation. Not only did the LXX translate the perfects in the past tense, but the poets risked a great amount of misunderstanding if they had indeed intended a volitional mood. Furthermore, the much stronger imperative form (as in 3:59, 63) would carry more rhetorical force than the weaker precative.[190] A similar objection is to doubt whether the perfects, imperfects, and imperatives in 3:52-66 should be translated in the exact same way, but this may be easily sidestepped by nuancing one's translation. Parry's final complaint is that if we read the entire section of 3:52-66 as a plea for Yahweh to help, "then we are in danger of evacuating the section of the confidence in Yahweh that is expressed by taking the perfects as past tense." He sees such confidence to make great sense in the light of the paraenesis in 3:22-39, and objects that "to empty this section of the confidence of faith is to imagine the man forgetting what he earlier remembered."[191] This seems quite a weak objection, for the same point can be made in the inverse. Could we not potentially

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[189] Provan, "Past, Present and Future," 174.

[190] Parry, *Lamentations*, 123-124.

[191] Parry, *Lamentations*, 124.

complain that the גבר unreasonably forgets the harsh reality of his present distress in 3:1-21? A theological preference for confident faith should not mitigate the actual rhetorical movement of the text.

But what of Parry's point that given the rarity of precative perfects the poet risked confusing readers? This is a valid objection and should not be blithely dismissed. While it undoubtedly carries a certain amount of weight, I believe consideration of the poetics in 3:52-66 provides a plausible alternative that fits well with my proposed rhetorical structure. Quite similar to observations put forth by Dobbs-Allsopp regarding 3:34-39, Thomas constructively highlights the aesthetics of the poetry in 3:52-66:

> However precisely understood, the verbal syntax of these verses stretches the limits of language to express the inherent tension and anticipation of divine deliverance and the relationship between the גבר and the deity. The alternation between imperative (Lam 3.59, 60, 63), perfective (Lam 3.55-58, 61-63), and imperfective (Lam 3.56-57, 64-66) forms reveal the uncertainty of the present situation: has Yhwh delivered, is he going to, or must the appeal for deliverance still go forth?[192]

With all of the above considerations, I follow the current trend to read 3:52-66 as an extended complaint to Yahweh. Chapter 3 ends, then, as it began – in distress. A shift does occur, though: While in 3:1-21, 42b-45 Yahweh is figured as the one who pursues the man as his enemy, in 3:63-66 he is called upon to pursue human enemies. Most striking is the repetition of חרפה "insults/scorn" in 3:30b and 3:61. While in the former one is instructed to be "satisfied" with insults, the latter undermines this advice through urgent appeal: "Hear their insults, Yahweh!" There remains an ambivalence of divine portraiture that refuses resolution. The sapiential recitation in 3:22-42a is clearly encircled by great anguish, and this position greatly destabilizes its theological hegemony. Lamentations 3:22-42a is a rhetorical stop-gap, heightening the stress upon lament that bookends the theodicy.[193] Thus, the paraenesis exemplifies the trauma of theodic speculation and its subsequent dissolution until finally this central section of Lamentations 3 can only be seen as a failed theodicy, an antitheodicy.

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[192] Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*, 202. See ibid. 202-211 for further discussion.
[193] Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology," 48-49; *idem, Lamentations*, 122-128. See esp. Federico Villanueva, *The "Uncertainty of a Hearing": A Study of the Sudden Change of Mood in the Psalms of Lament* (VTSup, 121; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 213-248.

Chapter 4

Theological Reflections & Conclusion

The Bible itself has a hundred theologies.

(KARL BARTH)[1]

Theologus gloriae dicit malum bonum, et bonum malum.
Theologus crucis dicit id quod res est.

(MARTIN LUTHER)[2]

Israel's experience of and reaction to exile greatly illuminate our own situation in faith and culture. For us too the old answers no longer hold. […] Frantic attempts to […] ground faith in a precritical view of Scripture indicate just how pervasive the silence of God has become. No one escapes this exile.

(RALPH W. KLEIN)[3]

1. *Maintaining the Category of Innocent Suffering*

THE BULK OF THIS STUDY IS BEHIND US. WE HAVE EXPLORED the nooks and crannies of Lamentations 3, but there is a bit more to add. I have repeatedly referred to "theodicy" throughout this work, but truth be told the Θεός of theodicy remains a moving target. Here I make a distinction between theodicy as

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[1] January 27, 1959 to English Colloquia in Basel. Quoted by Raymond Kemp Anderson, *An American Scholar Recalls Karl Barth's Golden Years as a Teacher (1958-1964): The Mature Theologian* (*Hors Série*; Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2013), ch. 4.

[2] "A theologian of glory calls evil good, and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls a thing what it actually is." Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation: Thesis 21."

[3] Ralph W. Klein, *Israel in Exile: A Theological Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 7.

classically conceived, and what Daniel Castelo has described as *theological* theodicy.[4] The theodicy against which I have proposed an *anti*-theodicy is *not* what I would describe as theological theodicy.

I privilege a form of *anti*-theodicy when dealing with the Biblical testimony, and this stems from my concerns related to certain expressions of feminist post-Shoah[5] theology. First, my sympathies with feminist post-Shoah theology are largely shaped by Melissa Raphael's important work, *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz*.[6] She levels a sustained critique against typical attempts at post-Shoah theology for their myopic dependence on the category of divine omnipotence, which she calls "a patriarchal fantasy," and, "a projection of the ultimate patriarchal aspiration onto God."[7] In contrast to the often woolly theologies of post-Shoah thinkers – for instance, the brazen claims made by David Blumenthal, where scriptural claims to divine violence are not questioned for their theological accuracy but are rather marshaled as evidence to indict God for abusive behavior[8] – Raphael's alternative proposal seeks to shape our picture of God around the feminine *Shekinah*, the maternal, suffering presence of the divine. Indeed, "what is to be distrusted is not God but a particular model or figure of God. It is certain notions of power that are abusive, not God, who, if he is abusive is demonstrably not God."[9] As for antitheodicy, I have followed Zachary Braiterman's description of the situation. Theodicy constitutes an attempt to "justify, explain, or find acceptable meaning to the relationship that subsists between God (or some form of ultimate reality), evil and suffering. In contrast, *antitheodicy* means refusing to justify, explain, or accept that relationship."[10] Yet I take the

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[4] Castelo, *Theological Theodicy*.

[5] Along with many contemporary Jewish scholars, I prefer to use the term "Shoah" (Heb. הַשּׁוֹאָה "the catastrophe/destruction") rather than "Holocaust" (Gk. ὁλόκαυστος "whole burnt offering"). The latter term denotes sacrifice, something that the slaughter of the Jewish people certainly was *not*.

[6] Melissa Raphael, *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz: A Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

[7] Raphael, *The Female Face of God,* 40.

[8] David Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993).

[9] Raphael, *The Female Face of God*, 49.

[10] Braiterman, (*God*) *After Auschwitz*, 4.

term a step further and conceive of it as a discourse practice that *actively critiques* theodicy.[11] This leads me to approach theodic texts in the Bible with what I would deem a necessary and appropriate level of criticism, giving attention to the world in front of the text. That is, in what ways does the text of Lamentations interact with present experience, and how does such experience impact interpretation of the book?

I see resisting the hegemony of retribution theodicies in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures to be an ethical imperative in a post-Shoah world, and conceive of such dialogical resistance as an act of faithfulness to notions of Scripture's "inspiration" and "authority." Bakhtin's dialogical approach places great importance on heeding the voice of "the Other," and on this score there is an important synergy that takes place with Hans Robert Jauss's "hermeneutics of alterity." In allowing ourselves to be provoked by the Other – in our case, those suffering in the rubble of sixth century Jerusalem, and all who suffer innocently since – we are moved to creatively fuse *and* differentiate our horizons of understanding. This is necessary so far as we have the tendency to domesticate the provocations of "the Other" until they are familiar, manageable, and unsurprising. Our post-Shoah experience has violently expanded the interpretive horizons of Lamentations. "Scripture and doctrine require 'rereadings' that restore the dimensions of surprise and alterity."[12] In that spirit, I aim to offer just such a "rereading." So, I will conclude this study with an extended theological reflection on the potential implications and applications of my exegesis. It is my hope that work in this area will further underscore the polyvalence of Scripture and lead to the dissolution of hegemonic abuse, furthering healthy theological dialogue.

A primary claim of this thesis is that Lamentations 3 attempts to maintain the category of innocent suffering. Classical Christian theology in the west has had difficulty accepting that suffering could in fact be gratuitous, and the innocence of victims has all too often fallen by the wayside. This is not due to a flippant dismissal of what common sense would quickly affirm, but is rather an attempt to remain faithful to a belief system that explains God's relation to evil. The sheer gratuity of suffering

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[11] Cf. Atle Ottesen Søvik, "Why almost all moral critique of theodicies is misplaced," *RelS* 44.4 (2008): 479-484; *idem*, "More on moral critique of theodicies: reply to Robert Simpson," *RelS* 47.3 (2011): 383-388.
[12] Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 103.

in the world aggravates a belief in God's meticulous providence and goodness, driving many to affirm God's mysterious, providential hand in hardship. The danger of meaninglessness is mitigated by infusing ostensible meaning into any given instance of suffering: the Deity must be punishing, judging, chastising, testing, and so on. To affirm the possibility of truly *innocent* suffering suggests the possibility of meaningless – or at least denies *inherent* meaning while affirming contingent meaning. Within a framework of meticulous providence, to deny that a tragedy was caused by God is to potentially run the risk of naming God as capricious or even complicit in evil – a sort of divine sin by omission.[13] Many questions are raised in light of this. Whether it is asking why God caused or allowed a given evil, or the many variations in between, the possibility of true innocence has proved too uncomfortable a risk for most. As modern psychology often reminds us, we would rather feel guilty than helpless, and we often turn to providence to speak meaning into the meaningless. Thence is born the project of theodicy.

The traditional Western Christian view was derived in part from portions of Augustine's early thought. Before his conversion, Augustine had found solace from the problem of evil in the clear, dualistic system offered by Manicheism, which held that evil is neither humanity's fault nor the fault of a true and good God who dwelled in a spiritual dimension beyond this world. Instead, evil is the work of an inferior, malignant demiurge who created the universe as this god's own physical embodiment. But later in his life, in *On Free Choice of the Will*, Augustine tackles this question again, revolving the entire dialogue around "whether God is not the cause of evil."[14] His answer is unequivocally No, God is *not* the cause of evil, and a distinction is made between two kinds of evil and their causal relation to God: evil that one does as a voluntary act and evil that one suffers. If one believes that "God is good," he claims, then "God does not do evil." "Also," he continues,

> if we admit that God is just (and it is sacrilege to deny this), He assigns rewards to the righteous and punishments to the wicked – punishments that are indeed evil for those who suffer. Therefore, if no one suffers punishment unjustly (this too we must believe, since we believe that the universe is governed by

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[13] See, e.g., Alan R. Rhoda, "Gratuitous evil and divine providence," *RelS* 46.3 (2010): 281-302.

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

divine Providence), God is the cause of the second kind of evil, but not of the first [viz., evil] done as a voluntary act by humans.[15]

One might be tempted here to see Augustine making a distinction between "moral" and "physical/natural" evil, the latter the product of natural cause-and-effect and nothing to do with God's primary causation. But this is not Augustine's argument, who rather attributes this evil to divine power. Augustine's judgment that no suffering is innocent represents the Western Christian tradition's classic theodicy to this problem. All evil, and so all suffering that stems from evil, is caused by the human will, and human persons are thus responsible for it.

But such moves seem to magnify meticulous providence and retributive justice to such a degree that innocent suffering is not only brought out of focus from God's caring eye, it is deemed impossible. How then are we to speak to those who suffer gratuitously? Simply deny the gratuitous nature of so much evil? True, there is a degree of comfort to be found in a conviction that what one is suffering was brought about by one's own doing, or by the providential hand of God. However painful this realization may be, it does bring with it the sense that "if you broke it, you can fix it," or, "the one who has broken me can also fix me" (see, e.g., Isa 9:13; 10:20; Hos 6:1; Nah 1:12). But in the face of extreme cases of suffering (e.g., child abuse, rape) claims of personal culpability defy reason. We cry out with the poet, "Look, Yahweh! Consider! Whom have you ever afflicted like this?" (Lam 2:20a). The maintenance of gratuitous and therefore innocent suffering is a welcome corrective to traditional theodicy, and especially so in a post-Shoah age where classic arguments begin to resemble abuse rather than comfort. Consider Elie Wiesel's famous play *The Trial of God* in which he sets a hearing (one he actually witnessed while at Auschwitz) as occurring in seventeenth-century Shamgorod, a Polish village in the midst of a pogrom. The defender of God in that play voices the traditional Jewish (and Christian) denial of innocent suffering in the following words:

> What do you know of God that enables you to denounce Him? [...] Think of our ancestors, who, throughout centuries, mourned over the massacre of their beloved ones and the ruin of their homes – and yet they repeated again and again that God's ways are just. Are we worthier than they were? Wiser? Purer? [...] After the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, our forefathers wept and proclaimed *umipnei*

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khataenou – it's all because of our sins. Their descendants said the same thing during the Crusades. And the Holy Wars. The same things during the pogroms. And now you want to say something else?[16]

God's defender regards the claim of innocent suffering as a capricious excuse for the guilt of the Jewish people, and Wiesel chillingly casts Satan in the role of God's trial defender.

In many respects Judaism has fared better than classic Christian theology in maintaining the category of innocent suffering, though not without its own difficulties. In the *Babylonian Talmud*, for instance, R. Ammi claimed, "There is no death without sin, and there is no suffering without iniquity" (*b. Shabb.* 55a), appealing to texts such as Ps 89:33 (Eng. = v. 32) and Ezekiel 18:20ff. Various other texts were often marshaled. The Wisdom of Solomon counsels the reader to not "invite" or "summon" death "by the error of your life" (1:12-16). *1 Enoch* claims a woman would die childless only due to her sin (98:5). *The Testament of Job*, in an effort to explain why Job's sons were susceptible to death, suggests pride as a possible sin (15:9-10). One may also see in this belief an uncritical appropriation of Eliphaz's ruinous advice to Job: "Think now, who that was innocent ever perished?" (Job 4:7). All deformities were viewed as a sign of sin, guilt, and uncleanness and prevented entering the Qumran community (CD 15:15; 1QM 7:4-5; 1QSa 2:4-10).

But though these views were widespread in both the Hebrew Bible and subsequent Jewish writings,[17] there remains a small but potent collection of voices that rise in protest – a collection in which I see Lamentations playing a vital and underutilized role. Lamentations uniquely and provocatively lays claim to the possibility of innocent suffering within Yahwism, early Judaism, and Christianity. Along with other works such as Job and many of the Psalms, the poems of Lamentations contribute to a seminal body of literature for exilic and post-exilic Judahites. Previous theodicies were seen by some as insufficient, and in Lam 3 we see a glimpse of the daring move to imagine a deity not responsible for their present evil. Subsequent literature in Judaism continued to maintain the category of innocent suffering through antitheodicy in important ways.

The Bakhtinian claim that dialogue itself is meaningful is beautifully displayed in Midrashic and Talmudic literature, where differing opinions are put forth and rarely resolved. Benjamin Sommer

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[16] Elie Wiesel, *The Trial of God* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 133-134.

[17] See esp. the *Jerusalem Talmud*, *passim*.

rightly notes that, "as one utilizes the findings of modern scholarship, one renews an essential characteristic of Jewish learning. Biblical exegesis in rabbinic and medieval Judaism has always focused on debate and variety....[T]he post-modern Jew revels in the diverse voices and counter-voices [discovered by critical Bible scholarship] so reminiscent of Talmudic and contemporary dialectic."[18] As is the case surrounding the issue of suffering throughout all of the *Babylonian Talmud,* R. Ammi's opinion noted above is heavily qualified and critiqued by dissenting Rabbis. The subsequent interaction in the text with this particular example undermines the simplistic nature of the claim. In *b. Shabb.* 55b the Talmudic editor quickly follows R. Ammi's opinion with the following discussion:

> An objection is raised: The ministering angels asked the Holy One, blessed be He: "Sovereign of the Universe! Why didst Thou impose the penalty of death upon Adam?" Said He to them, "I gave him an easy command, yet he violated it." "But Moses and Aaron fulfilled the whole Torah," they pursued, "yet they died."

The text answers with an opinion from R. Shimon b. Eleazar, who clarifies that they died because of their failure to obey God's command during Israel's wandering in the desert. But these "other rabbis" marshal a second objection: "Four died through the serpent's machinations,[19] viz., Benjamin the son of Jacob, Amram the father of Moses, Jesse the father of David, and Caleb the son of David" (*b. Shabb.* 55a-b). The text makes a remarkable move at this point and attributes the source of these objections to R. Shimon b. Eleazar, the only other figure mentioned in the passage. His seniority overrides R. Ammi's opinion, and thus: "Hence it must surely be R. Shimon b. Eleazar, which proves that there is death without sin and suffering without iniquity. Thus the refutation of R. Ammi is [indeed] a refutation" (*b. Shabb.* 55b).[20]

This sort of religious protestation provides an avenue to maintain innocent suffering within a theistic framework. In the same way, Lam 3 provides an ambiguous, poetic deconstruction of traditional theodicy. We might also see as an apocalyptic parallel to this the bold, rebellious prayers

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[18] Benjamin Sommer, "The Scroll of Isaiah as Jewish Scripture, Or Why Jews Don't Read Books," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1996 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 225-242 (quoting 238). See also Israel Knohl, *The Divine Symphony: The Bible's Many Voices* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003).

[19] Not to be confused with a doctrine of Original Sin, which Judaism rejects.

[20] Cf. *b. Ber.* 5a.

offered by the author of *4 Ezra* (the so-called "Apocalypse of Ezra"). Consider, for example, the daring accusations in 3:20-22 concerning God's culpability in human evil: "But you did not take away their evil heart from them, so that your law might produce fruit in them! For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him. Thus the disease became permanent; the law was in the hearts of the people along with the evil root; but what was good departed, and the evil remained." But while modern sympathies may lie with the voice of Ezra, the resultant rebukes from the Lord are disheartening, parroting the common theodicies by appealing to mystery and the inscrutableness of God's ways in a fashion reminiscent of Yahweh in the book of Job (e.g., *4 Ezra* 4:2ff.; 5:40ff.), and "justice deferred" due to the entrenchment of evil in this age. This is far from satisfactory, and even Ezra indicts God on this count, effectively accusing the Lord of a red herring (!):

> Then I answered and said, "I implore you, my Lord, why then have I been endowed with the power of understanding? For I did not wish to inquire about the ways above, but instead about those things that we daily experience! Why Israel have been given over to the Gentiles in disgrace; why the people whom you loved has been given over to godless tribes, and the law of our ancestors has been brought to destruction and the written covenants no longer exist! We pass from the world like locusts, and our life is like a mist, and we are not worthy to obtain mercy. But what will he [God] do for his name that is invoked over us? It is about *these* things that I have asked."[21]

So, it is my contention that Lamentations represents a seminal stage in the antitheodicy we see blossoming in material such as (but not exclusively) Job, *4 Ezra*, the Targumim, and the Midrashim.

3. *Conclusion*

Most of this study has focused on the rhetorical effect on Lamentations. As a piece of religious literature produced in the midst of terrible suffering, it contains undeniable strains of both theodic and antitheodic reflection. This quickly moves interpretive efforts into the theological and ethical: What do the poems of Lamentations claim about God, and what are the ethical implications? As I have already made clear, part of my methodology in this piece stems from an ideological commitment

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[21] *4 Ezra* 4:22-25. See also esp. 5:33-35; 7:44-48, 60-69, 102-126.

to nonviolence, and particularly the need to resist the violence of religious fundamentalism. So, what are we to make of Lamentations' portrayal of God?

All five poems, I have argued, display a vibrant dialogism that forces the text to remain "open" to interpretive possibilities. That said, it is not the case that interpretive anarchy rules the day, as though any given interpretation carries equal weight. There are certain portrayals of the divine that demand opposition, and this stance can be found all throughout Scripture itself. My argument is that Lamentations utilizes holiness-code and prophetic conceptions, but uses them ironically so that it functions literarily as a dialogical *reductio ad absurdum*, with a strong appeal to *prima facie* moral untenability. In other words, to employ a theodicy as in 3:22-42a is to attempt to justify the morally unjustifiable, to sanctify human sacrifice as a necessary means to assuage divine wrath or exhaust the demands of divine justice. To put it another way, the theodicy in Lam 3 buckles under the weight of lived experience. Such a theodicy is in fact morally absurd, as the ensuing distress and ambivalence throughout the rest of the chapter and the book underscores. The realities of war are gratuitous evils, indiscriminately and disproportionately afflicting communities and the individuals therein. I draw here on Marilyn McCord Adams's work on "horrendous evils" and their potential, almost inevitable, ruinous quality.[22] If we adopt these theodic convictions, we immediately run into the problem of God's violent behavior in the Bible. With the horrendous evils displayed throughout books like Lamentations, how could one truthfully claim that God is in fact good to each created individual? In my proposed reading, we may read the theodicy of Lam 3 as thoroughly ironized, its literary function ultimately constituting an antitheodicy and anthropodicy. In Girardian terms, we could even see this passage, and Lamentations as a whole, contributing to the slow unveiling of the innocence of victims and the nonviolence of the deity in the Hebrew Scriptures. But it is nonetheless, as Girard would put it, a text in travail.[23]

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[22] See M. M. Adams, *Horrendous Evils*; *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[23] René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 274-276 and *passim*.

At the root of my proposal is the joint movement of antitheodicy and the inevitability of innocent suffering. But a possible issue is still whether it is feasible to conceive of "consequences of sins" apart from God's direct punishment (viz., primary causality) – more to the point, whether such conceptions were present in sixth century Judah. Further still, whether Judahites could have realistically imagined divinity devoid of retributive violence. Again, the liminal, underdeveloped nature of these insights is to be emphasized. I offer Jer 2:19 as another instance where we glimpse this theological possibility: תיסרך רעתך ומשׁבותיך תוכחך "Your wickedness/evil will punish you, and your apostasies will convict you." The גבר in Lam 3 is a victim in travail who, in the midst of his theodic speculation (3:22-42a), reaches a point where he dares to imagine a God without retributive violence. Yet the mimetic contagion of violence sweeps back in and overtakes that voice, and we are left with a victim in travail, angry with God, crying out for divine vengeance. But the possibility of a nonviolent, non-retributive deity is glimpsed, if only for a moment. The trenchant liminality of this perspective should not surprise us. René Girard: "A non-violent deity can only signal his existence to mankind by having himself driven out by violence – by demonstrating that he is not able to establish himself in the Kingdom of Violence. But this very demonstration is bound to remain ambiguous for a long time, and it is not capable of achieving a decisive result, since it looks like total impotence to those who live under the regime of violence. That is why at first it can only have some effect under a guise, deceptive through the admixture of some sacrificial elements, through the surreptitious re-insertion of some violence into the conception of the divine."[24]

I suggest the situation in Lamentations is one of *opus alienum Dei*, in which it constitutes the harsh reality of the suffering occurring in Jerusalem, הרעות. Classically, the *opus alienum Dei* was regarded as contrary to God's good nature yet nevertheless a divine action. But an obvious tension exists in the dialectic between *opus alienum* and *opus proprium*, and it is in this liminal space that I propose the גבר anguishes over the true nature of God. Many traditions within the Hebrew Bible insist that even the *opus alienum Dei* is nonetheless God's work, and most of Lamentations assumes

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[24] Girard, *Things Hidden*, 219-220.

God's direct causality in Jerusalem's fate. Indeed, Lam 3:38 as I have interpreted it raises significant dialogical tension with other portions of Lamentations, especially 1:21b כל איבי שמעו רעתי ששׂו כי אתה עשׂית "All of my enemies have heard of my evil trouble; they are glad that you yourself have done it." And yet it is precisely this claim that seems to flounder under the weight of grim reality throughout Lamentations 3. This judgment is seen as such a stark *opus alienum Dei* that accusations of divine injustice spill forth: "Look, Yahweh, and consider! Whom have you ever afflicted in this way? Should women eat their offspring, their healthy infants?" (Lam 2:20). Indeed, the terms עוללת ("afflict") and עללי ("infants") produce a "horrific pun,"[25] ironizing descriptions of Yahweh's actions in 1:5, 22, and 2:1-12, resulting in the underscoring of accusations of divine injustice. Depictions of cannibalism as a result of warfare are disturbingly common in the OT (e.g., Deut 28:52-57; Jer 19:1-9; Ezek 5:10; etc.). Lamentations 3:42b-43: "...but *you!* You have not forgiven! You have smothered [us] in anger and pursued us; you slaughtered without mercy." It truly is "alien work" to the God they know; why would Yahweh treat his own people so? The *opus proprium Dei* is always and only good, הטוב, and it is this conviction that causes the גבר to cry out, "Who spoke that this should happen? Adonai did not command this!" (3:37).

Lamentations 3:22-42a constitutes a profound effort in the poet's theodic imagination to renegotiate his received tradition, revealing the ambiguous, complex interaction between *traditio* and *traditum*, what Ellen Davis has termed "critical traditioning."[26] Here I follow Davis and have in mind Michael Fishbane's important discussion on scribal activities and intrabiblical exegesis. Pushing against the view that one can atomize sharply between the roles of author and scribe, preserver and tradent, Fishbane sees an overlapping relationship between the two aspects of tradition: *traditio*, the process of creating, emending, and passing on; and *traditum*, the canonical deposit which is received as authoritative and passed on. Pertinent to our present purpose is his claim that

> an emending *traditio* (whose primary concern is – in any event – the faithful transmission of the text) does not so much interrupt the *traditum* with material of independent authority as simply supplement or adjust it. Viewed in this way, the *traditum* dominates the *traditio* and conditions its operations. And to the extent that the scribal *traditio* makes the *traditum* lexically more accessible, theologically more palatable, or

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[25] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 99.

[26] Ellen F. Davis, "Critical Traditioning: Seeking an Inner Biblical Hermeneutic," *AThR* 82.4 (2000): 733-751.

materially more comprehensive, its operations are intended to reinforce the authority of the *traditum* and to serve it. Even those scribal remarks which contradict the manifest *traditum*, one might add, confirm the dominating presence of the *traditum* in their attempts to provide alternatives to it.[27]

It must be pointed out that one of Fishbane's issues with terminology was a failure of precision. He simply forced the *traditio/traditum* relationship to do too much work for a study of his depth. When it comes to actual analysis, it doesn't do to use *traditio*, for instance, as a vague blanket term covering redaction, interpretation, text traditions, oral traditions, cultic traditions, and so on. Future work in intrabiblical exegesis still requires a more precise lexical stock. But whether or not Fishbane was himself consistent with this methodology,[28] for present purposes I avail myself of the *traditio/traditum* terminology for the sake of brief reference to large swaths of Biblical material, fully aware of the resulting obfuscation when pressed for precision.

Critical dialogism is the canonical deposit, and the fact of theological diversity has left an indelible mark on Scripture. Here I strongly agree with the basic argument of Yoram Hazony's thesis that the literature of the Hebrew Bible represents a philosophical tradition of "reasonable inquiry" rather than revelation (this in contrast to the NT, which is primarily a witness to the latter).[29] So, instead of an incorrigible overlord, the *traditum* is an essential conversation partner. We revisit the tradition again and again in order to avoid both blind fideism and historical chauvinism. This important dynamic can also be fruitfully explored as "the repeated invention of tradition,"[30] a crucial key to Judaism's "cultural persistence"[31] after repeated imperial occupations. Anathea Portier-Young describes the varied ancestral laws as "an important site of contest as well as an important resource for the ongoing

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[27] Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 86-87.

[28] "But what is more (and more serious), Fishbane does not go on to use the terms in the manner in which he himself has defined them! [...] And so, although it is only a matter of terminology, *traditum* vs. *traditio* ends up becoming something of a thorn in the book's side, or the reader's rump" (James Kugel, "The Bible's Earliest Interpreters," *Proof* 7.3 [1987]: 269-283), 273, 274.

[29] Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 63-65.

[30] Anathea Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 75. Here she echoes Eric Hobsbawm and others in *The Invention of Tradition,* Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[31] Steven Weitzman, *Surviving Sacrilege: Cultural Persistence in Jewish Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 6, 8-11, and *passim*.

negotiation, construction, and articulation of Jewish identity, practice, and belief in the midst of the colonial situation[s]."[32]

Two extreme reactions tend to play out in light of these realities: (1) Deny the theological diversity, and either ignore the claims or painstakingly work to "prove" the Bible's (ostensible) self-consistency; or (2), use the fact of theological diversity as the straw that breaks the camel's back, damning the collection of documents to irrelevance and undermining any sensible claim to the Bible's possible authoritative role, not to mention any claims to divine revelation. Does this mean, then, a Derridean-deconstructionism? Not necessarily. After all, we have noted that even Bakhtin allowed for provisional monologizations in epistemology. This question leads us into the much larger discussion of worldviews, mindsets, hermeneutics, and so on. But plenty of others have spent time on these questions much more ably than I, and this is not the place for an extended reflection.

Lamentations is a wonderful case study in the Biblical canon. Not only does the book itself engage in a critical dialogue with other Hebrew literary traditions, but we see this revisited in the Targumim and Midrashim. The theological ambiguity in Lamentations canonizes the conversation itself. Dialogism, not monologism, is the very essence of the canonical tradition. Neither Jewish nor Early Christian interpreters were naïve in this respect. They were acutely aware of the diverse outlooks in Scripture, but chose to look beneath surface aberrations to what they deemed the spiritual meaning of the text.[33] The entire book of Lamentations – but especially chapter 3 – may be seen, then, as a particularly impassioned example of this relationship between contesting theologies. This is an apt moment to recall the earlier discussion of Bakhtin's hermeneutical philosophy. Lamentations is a demonstrably "open" and "unfinalizable" text. It refuses accommodation to the hegemony of orthodox theodicy. Through the rhetorical effect of tragic irony, the discourse of stereotypical theodicy in 3:22-42a is given a different intention than originally intended. This means that the גבר's theodicy constitutes passive double-voiced discourse, resulting in my claim that the section as a whole

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[32] Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 75; cf. 49-77.
[33] See, e.g., Peter Enns, "Apostolic Hermeneutics and an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture: Moving Beyond a Modernist Impasse," *WTJ* 65 (2003): 263-287.

functions as an antitheodicy. Carleen Mandolfo's summary of Lam 1-2 works equally well for my proposal in Lam 3:

> The terror and incomprehensibility of her situation compels Zion to try to find language within her generic traditions to account for what has happened by countering and navigating the prophetic language that ostensibly already provides a rationale for her experience. The traditional account is no longer tenable in the culmination of what it prophesied.[34]

Yet it is my contention that 3:22-42a does not merely parrot the received *traditum* regarding covenantal judgment (e.g., Deut 28), but is instead an especially stark interaction between received *traditum* and emended *traditio*. Having exhausted the moral feasibility of traditional theodicy, the גבר now dares to imagine a God with no admixture of *opus alienum*, where הרעות is so foreign to the deity's nature that one strains theological propriety to claim such tragedy could actually come from the hand of Yahweh. This swelling crescendo of disillusionment culminates in the audacious suggestion: "Adonai did not command this! From the mouth of the Most High does not come evil, but good! Why then should a man complain against the Living One when the yoke of his sin-fate overwhelms?" (vv. 37b-39). David Gunn and Danna Fewell highlight the dialogical nature of Scripture: "Because of its multivocal nature, the Bible, despite its biases of gender, race/ethnicity, and class, makes provision for its own critique. The Bible shows us not merely patriarchy, elitism, and nationalism, it shows us the fragility of these ideologies through irony and counter-voices. Xenophobic Joshua and Ezra are undermined by the book of Ruth. David is countered by Hannah and Rizpah. The patriarchy of Persia is threatened by the single woman Vashti."[35] And, I would add, the ostensible legitimacy of Yahweh's violent actions toward Jerusalem is undermined by the antitheodicy of Lady Zion and הגבר.

It is a bold step in Israel's theodic imagination, but it ultimately proves either too costly or too dissonant with received orthodoxy. Right on the heels of this provocative suggestion, the גבר quickly falls back into despair ("You! You have not forgiven!" 3:42b), and dubiety proceeds to dominate the remainder of the book. Even though it seems a small glimmer of hope begins to shine, the theodic

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[34] Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets*, 76.

[35] David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 204.

speculation has now dissolved, overcome by the trauma of Jerusalem's disastrous reality. The dissonance is too great, the suffering too severe to be justified. In literary hindsight, as the reader is propelled forward by the acrostic form, the theodic speculation of the גבר is perceived as a failed theodicy. Rhetorically, its function is disclosed as an *antitheodicy*: It stands in the text engulfed on either side by bitter lament and complaint, subverting its function as an explanatory tool until it becomes a tragic monument to the vacuous enterprise that is theodicy. Lamentations as a whole is further disclosed as an *anthropodicy*. The גבר "does not disparage the ethical vision directly. He does not have to. In keeping with his paratactic style he merely needs to present an aspect of the ethical vision and then suffuse it with arresting and manifold images of human suffering to make the inability of the ethical vision to contain such suffering strikingly obvious. In other words, ultimately the events of 587/6 explode and finally ironize the ethical vision."[36]

In the face of claims that God has orchestrated as punishment such horrors as cannibalism (Lam 1:5, 11; 2:12, 20; 4:10), rape (5:11), and indiscriminate slaughter (2:21), attempts at classic theodicy are well meant but seem guilty of misguided cruelty. Traditional justifications of divine judgment smolder sinisterly among the rubble of Jerusalem. In the face of gratuitous suffering, the task of theodicy is *reducitur ad absurdum*, and the strident theodicies of the Deuteronomistic and prophetic corpora are chastened. The poet "refuses to deny the evidence of his senses in the name of faith, to pretend that there is some higher or inner world in which these horrific events are unknown."[37] Heath Thomas is representative of interpretive trends when he asserts that "Lam 3:31-36 inverts the anti-theodic threads and re-weaves a theological tapestry of hope and divine justice,"[38] but I see precisely the opposite occurring – in fact, a bolstering of antitheodicy.

Dobbs-Allsopp claims that "the *importance* and *success* of the Bible's dominant theodic interpretations of the exile should not be undervalued. The ongoing vitality of the Judeo-Christian religious traditions owes much to this literature's tenacious affirmation of God and God's goodness,

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[36] Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology, " 47.

[37] Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 19.

[38] Thomas, *Poetry and Theology*, 190.

power, and active providential care of the world even in the face of such adversity."[39] While undoubtedly important, I confess I struggle to accept that the word "successful" may be accurately applied to many of the Bible's attempts at theodicy, and most fail at preserving divine goodness. Though I am not as pessimistic as Crenshaw, I empathize deeply when he laments that "the Judeo-Christian world has put itself in a strait-jacket by reifying a literary construct. It has failed to distinguish between poetic imagination in the service of theology and reality itself. [...] Confronted by mounting [literary] evidence of evil within God, we quickly endeavor to mitigate its consequences and to soften the blows of 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.'" Attempts at legitimizing the various Biblical theodicies *in toto* seem to demand "the absolutization of a literary fiction, at the same time that it grasps at straws in positing an element of truth in that construction of reality. While I cannot subscribe to the validity of the portrait of God in the Bible, I draw my own painting from it, together with my religious longing, and offer it as a viable alternative. Consistency would require me to abandon the enterprise altogether. That I am not yet willing to do so is testimony to the power of a literary construct and a religious community shaped by poetic imagination."[40]

Indeed, Paul House's frequent assertion that Lamentations exhibits an "outrageous demonstration" of God's grace seems to me to exhibit Crenshaw's strait-jacket, and carries with it disturbing implications. Ostensibly God's grace is so "outrageous" in that Jerusalem is guilty of sin and does not deserve divine restoration – her punishment is just and deserved. Yet one has to wonder if divinely orchestrated slaughter, cannibalism, or rape could *ever* be justified, or whether such actions are intrinsically unjust, wildly disproportionate to any sin-guilt one may in fact have. To emphasize that God's punishment in Lamentations is measured and fitting, and any notion of divine grace or restoration innately "outrageous," seems to imply that siege warfare, cannibalism, and rape are *not* "outrageous" punishments. And this is unacceptable.

The small and varied deposits in Israel's theodic imagination as found in Lamentations bloomed, I would argue, into the complex negotiations in ante-Nicene Christianity surrounding the personhood

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[39] Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 28 (emphasis added).
[40] Crenshaw, *Defending God*, 181, 182.

and character of God. Faced with the disturbing implications of a literal reading of Scriptures that described God in deplorable ways, Origen's seminal method of allegoresis inspired a hermeneutical *novum* that effectively renegotiated the ancient Hebrew and contemporary Jewish conceptions of the divine. For instance, mentions of divine wrath and punishment inflicted by God in the Bible were often attenuated by an allegorical reweaving so that the "literal" atrocities depicted in Scripture were now "spiritualized" metaphors or typologies. In Origen's *Homiliae in Iesum Nave* (Homilies on Joshua) 15.1, for example, he remarked: "If these carnal wars related in the Jewish history were not to be interpreted in a spiritual sense, the apostles would never have transmitted the Jewish books for reading in the church to the disciples of Christ, who came to preach." In *Homiliae in Exodum* 4.8, he claims Yahweh did not literally slaughter the firstborn of Egypt, but rather snuffs out the firstborn signs of sin ("the Egyptians") in our souls.[41]

Much of the resulting influence on Christian hermeneutics was further buttressed by some of the Ante-Nicene theologians in claiming that God was ἀπαθής and ἀόργητος (the latter not to be confused with ἀοργησία, "a disorder of the emotions/anger"). Ilaria Ramelli's recent work on ἀποκατάστασις thoroughly displays the influence of ante-Nicene theologians – especially Origen – on creating an "apokatastasistic" hermeneutic in early Christianity,[42] and the writings of these theologians were based strongly on concerns revolving around theodicy and establishing which actions would befit God. There was a heavy emphasis on God's "goodness" (ἀγαθότης, *bonitas*), the divine as the "absolute good" (*summum bonum*), and the ethical, theological, and hermeneutical implications of this commitment. Within that context, for God to be ἀπαθής and ἀόργητος was clearly preferable to a divinity with an excess of πάθος and ὀργὴ, prone to irrational and disproportionate outbursts of fury in

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[41] By way of another example, Origen bluntly declares at the beginning of his *Homilae in Iesum Nave* that "the book [of Joshua] does not so much indicate to us the deeds of the son of Nun [viz., Joshua], as it represents for us the mysteries of Jesus my Lord" (§1.3). So, for instance, in Josh 2 Rahab represents the church, and the scarlet cord she hung out the window symbolizes the blood of Christ (§3.4-5).

[42] Ilaria Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (VCSup, 120; Leiden: Brill, 2013), esp. 137-277. See also Ramelli, "*In Illud: Tunc et Ipse Filius* (1 Cor 15,27-28): Gregory of Nyssa's Exegesis, its Derivations from Origen, and Early Patristic Interpretations Related to Origen's," in Jane Baun, A. Cameron, M. Edwards, M. Vinzent (eds.), *Studia Patristica XLVI: Tertullian to Tyconius, Egypt before Nicaea, Athanasius and his Opponents* (StPatr, 46; Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 259-274.

reaction to human sin.[43] To think of God *literally* experiencing wrath resulting in reactive actions of retribution is to collapse the analogical interval of our theologizing to an unacceptable degree, and the language of *apatheia* served to guard such anthropomorphic excesses. Indeed, the very fact that a literal reading of many OT narratives (and some NT, e.g., Revelation) produced such a disturbing deity provided a substantial theological rationale to defend allegoresis and a God without passion or wrath.[44] A particularly potent example from Origen is found in *Selecta in primum librum Regum* 2.1, commenting on the story of Lot's incest in Gen 19:30-38: "If it teaches something useful in an elevated sense, God knows, as does that person who has received the gift to expound these matters. As for the usefulness of the story itself, it would take quite a search to find it! Indeed, what profit can I find from the story of Lot and his daughters?"[45] Of course, what is so ironic about the conflicts between Origen and Marcion is that they agreed on the problem – viz., some Biblical depictions of God are reprehensible – and only disagreed on the solution. Joseph Trigg astutely observes that "Marcion threw out the Old Testament on account of the unworthiness of the God it depicted. Origen retained the Old Testament and sought to interpret it in such a way as to exclude from its depiction of God the qualities Marcion condemned."[46]

Whatever the case, given that God is ἀπαθής and ἀόργητος, it was often (though not always) argued that God therefore does not in fact punish through primary causality. Rather, sin chosen through human will and the resultant consequences are punishments in themselves[47] – an insight I

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[43] See, e.g., *Epistle to Diognetus* 8.7; *ANF* 1.28. Ignatius, for instance, praised the bishop of the Philadelphian church for his ἀκίνητος ("stability") and ἀόργητος precisely because these were qualities of "the living God" (*Ep. ad Phil.* 1.2; *ANF* 1.79).

[44] Of course, it goes without saying that the roots of allegoresis are deep and complex, going far beyond theodic concerns. See, e.g., I. Ramelli, "The Philosophical Stance of Allegory in Stoicism and its Reception in Platonism, Pagan and Christian: Origen in Dialogue with the Stoics and Plato," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 18.3 (2011): 335-371.

[45] Trans. Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1983), 200.

[46] Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy*, 50. See also Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007); Edmon L. Gallagher, *Hebrew Scripture in Patristic Biblical Theory: Canon, Language, Text* (VCSup, 114; Leiden: Brill, 2012); Michael, Graves, *The Inspiration and Interpretation of Scripture: What the Early Church Can Teach Us* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

[47] See esp. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 4.72.1ff.; *ANF* 4:529: οὐ πάθος τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστιν ἡ ὀργή.

claim is in fact liminally present in Lam 3:39. Clement of Alexandria unequivocally stated that "God does not punish [τιμωρεῖτα] – since punishment is the retribution of evil with further evil – but corrects [κολάζει] for the sake of those who are corrected, both in general and singularly."[48] Indeed, κακίας πάντῃ πάντως ἀναίτιος ὁ Θεὸς, "God is in all ways absolutely guiltless of evil."[49] So, bringing back in the concerns of theodicy, I agree with Marilyn Adams's contention that *the problem of sin is real* but ultimately *derivative*: "The fundamental reason why the human condition generally and Divine-human relations specifically are non-optimal is that God has created us radically vulnerable to horrors, by creating us as embodied persons, personal animals, enmattered spirits in a material world of real or apparent scarcity such as this. Sin is a symptom and a consequence, but neither the fundamental *explanans* nor the principal *explanandum*. The real roots of our non-optimality problems are systemic and metaphysical."[50] Think again of the protestation in *4 Ezra* 3:20: "But you did not take away their evil heart from them, so that your law might produce fruit in them!" Put another way: When the גבר of Lam 3 says, "Why then should a man complain against the Living One when the yoke of his sin-fate overwhelms?," he is not speaking there of actively meted out divine punishment. Rather, he draws a distinction between divine goodness as primary causality (Lam 3:33, 37-38) and then secondary causality (Lam 3:34-36, 39), the latter played out in terms of "sin-fate" – that is, the consequences of individual and communal sins, affecting all groups and unavoidably including innocent sufferers.

Origen and others were of course seminal figures who provided a viable avenue to mitigate the presence of sacred violence in Scripture. But however promising their interpretive approaches may have been in antiquity, it is problematic to allegorize or spiritualize divine violence without first critiquing its literal violence. Texts like Lam 2:20, 3:1-21, and 4:4, 9-10 must be *directly* confronted and challenged. The antitheodicy of Lamentations plays a vital role in this endeavor and is an invaluable

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[48] See Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.16.102. Clement even calls the πῦρ αἰώνιον that was sent by God against Sodom "full of discernment" (φρόνιμον) and declares that the very punishment of that city was τῆς εὐλογίστου τοῖς ἀνθρώποις σωτηρίας εἰκών, "for the human beings the image of their well calculated salvation" (*Paedaogus* 3.8.44-45)!

[49] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.2.12.

[50] McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 237-238, and *passim*.

stimulus for further theodic reflection. The counterpoint between testimony about God's loving justice and cruel abusiveness creates an unbearable tension that remains unresolved throughout Lamentations. Kathleen O'Connor bemoans the possibility that such is reality of life, but "if God really is violent and abusive as well as gracious and merciful, I want nothing to do with religion. [...] If this view is right about God, then God is unethical, and human ethics must be anchored elsewhere or abandoned altogether. [...] Violent abuses of power in the world are inscribed within God and have their origins and model in God's own character. Violent oppression connects the heavens and the earth in a twisting Möbius strip of oppression."[51] She is adamant that "Lamentations' insistence on God's punishing violence must be critiqued for our time."[52]

Implicit in all of this is a commitment to a rule of theological-moral adjudication,[53] which, simply put, might be described as a hermeneutic of *shalom*,[54] a prioritization of God's goodness and peace in the interpretive task.[55] This is analogous to and should complement the early Church's *regula fidei* as articulated by Tertullian (*De praesc. haer.* 12) and Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 1.10), and Augustine's interpretive rule of love (*Doct. chr.* 1.84-85, 95-96; 3.54). But I propose we must go even further in our hermeneutics. In the words of Martin Luther: *Crux probat omnia. Crux sola est nostra theologia. Crux Christi unica est eruditio verborum dei, theologia syncerissima.*[56] Of course, narrowing hermeneutical priority to a theology of the cross does not solve everything. Writers as diverse as Luther, John Piper, Jürgen Moltmann, John Caputo, and J. Denny Weaver all claim a *theologia crucis*, but one would be

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[51] O'Connor, *Lamentations & The Tears of the World*, 119.

[52] O'Connor, *Lamentations & The Tears of the World*, 120-123.

[53] The language of this interpretive principle is drawn from Charles Cosgrove, *Appealing to Scripture in Moral Debate: Five Hermeneutical Rules* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 2-4, 154-180. He gives the term as "moral-theological adjudication," but a robust theological ethics would seem to demand the order should be reversed: theological-moral adjudication. See T. F. Torrance's language of an "epistemological inversion." Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (London/New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 130-133.

[54] See David J. Neville, *A Peaceable Hope: Contesting Violent Eschatology in New Testament Narratives* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 244-255.

[55] For a theological model that prioritizes divine goodness and peace as the nonnegotiable essence of the gospel story, see esp. David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 56-72.

[56] The Cross is the criterion of all things. [...] The Cross alone is our theology. [...] The Cross of Christ is the only instruction in the words of God, the purest theology." Martin Luther, WA 5:176, 179, 217.

hard pressed to find significant agreement among any of them. At this point, I would offer David Neville's assertion as an appropriate criterion: "The means by which the crucified Jesus 'conquered' are the means by which God 'conquers,' *without remainder*."[57] Still, the details of these "means" are hotly debated, as any casual glance at current debates on atonement make clear. Among other commitments, whether one holds to Penal Substitutionary Atonement or a form of *Christus Victor*, for instance, will profoundly dictate what one means by "conquer." In the former, the cross exemplifies violence as the *sine qua non* of God's salvific action. In the latter, our human ideas of "conquering" are radically subverted: This God conquers through self-sacrificial love; this God suffers violence rather than inflicts it, and through this mysteriously quenches the contagion of retributive violence. "The weakness of God is stronger than human strength." The dialectic between ἀπαθής and παθητός – the former necessarily being the metaphysical ground for the latter – allows Gregory Thaumaturgus to speak in the following paradoxical terms:

> His blessed and impassible nature manifested its impassibility precisely in its passion. For whatever suffers is subject to passion when destructive passion prevails over it against the will of the one who suffers. But when someone voluntarily – being by nature impassible – is involved in the passions so as to defeat them, we do not say that he has been subjected to passion, even though he shared in passions by his own will.[58]

Ultimately, Gregory concludes, "Impassibility is not exalted over the passions unless it first shows its power through suffering."[59] And so, the crucified Christ may function as a theological synecdoche *par excellence* wherein the resurrection is seen not as the *negation* of the cross, but rather its *vindication*. "[T]heology's claim is that the resurrection shows that Christ overcomes the discourses of power that crucify not by a kindred violence but by way of the infinite motion of peace that is the shape of his

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[57] Neville, *A Peaceable Hope*, 241 (his italics).

[58] Gregory Thaumaturgus, *To Theopompus*, 6; from *St. Gregory Thaumaturgus, Life and Words*, trans. M. Slusser (*The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 98; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1998).

[59] Gregory Thaumaturgus, *To Theopompus*, 7. Gregory was not entirely consistent in his approach, though, and retained a reluctance in this dialectic to speak positively of God's passions. See Daniel Castelo, *The Apathetic God: Exploring the Contemporary Relevance of Divine Impassibility* (Paternoster Theological Monographs; Eugene: Wipf & Stock 2009), 40-68.

whole life"[60] — that is, *cruciform*. Without reservation we can say alongside Simone Weil, "*la Croix seule me suffit*."[61] Much more could and should be said on this score, but that is not my present task.

With emerging trends I propose that Scripture itself provides the oft-sought *via media* in that the canonical editors were in fact aware of its internal inconsistency and diversity of traditions, and we are meant to engage that fact vigorously. It is the gift of sacred space to the community of faith in which to wrestle with both God and received traditions.[62] The viability of my theological reading of Lamentations 3 should be weighed both against historical and contemporary horizons of interpretation. Where I anticipate resistance would be with the plausibility of the former. Hans Robert Jauss reminds us, "The literary experience of the reader [takes place...] within the objectifiable systems of expectations that arise for each work," and these "horizons of expectation" are necessarily defined and shaped both by the reader's "preunderstanding" (*Vorverständnis*) and "the historical moment of [the text's] appearance."[63] And so the key question is whether the portrait of theodic crisis I have painted exceeds the "systems of expectations" that arise in the text of Lamentations. I don't believe so, even though a measure of novelty admittedly resides in certain parts of my proposal. This is the case, I think, due to the fact that the antitheodicy of Lamentations 3 is a neglected voice in the dialogical experience that is "the canon," a voice to which we have unwittingly become deaf. The louder, more prominent voices of biblical theodicy have heretofore dominated the horizon, oftentimes resulting in the flattening of biblical discourse into a homogenized whole – a singular, monolithic *theology* of the Old Testament, where it is more appropriate to speak of *theologies* of the Old Testament.[64] And so Erhard Gerstenberger's aptly named and executed project, *Theologies of the Old Testament*, and its original German subtitle: *Pluralität und Synkretismus alttestamentlichen Gottesglaubens.* A similar approach is, of course, the driving force behind Brueggemann's oeuvre, and

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[60] David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 414.

[61] Simone Weil, *Lettre à un Religieux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), 58.

[62] See Karl Allen Kuhn, *Having Words With God: The Bible as Conversation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 14.

[63] Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. T. Bahti (Theory and History of Literature 2; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 22.

[64] Erhard Gerstenberger, *Theologies of the Old Testament*, trans. John Bowden (London / New York: T & T Clark, 2002).

the inspiration behind his fruitful metaphor of "testimony/countertestimony" for Old Testament theology. The tendency of past generations toward theological monologism has often blinded interpreters from the disputatious nature of many biblical passages, especially amongst the laments and Wisdom tradition. I am simply proposing that, once we embrace the reality of dialogism in the biblical canon and even within individual books, we can do justice to the Hebrew text of Lamentations in all its wavering, potent contradiction.

Ultimately, the discourse of theodicy is unfinalizable, unceasingly open, and innately provisional – a burden that can never claim sufficient justification nor remain entirely mute. It is an asymptotic journey that demands the practice of hermeneutics, the art of listening to and dialoguing with the other. I hope that recognition of this counter-testimony will problematize the panacean formulations offered by both the Bible and its modern theodicists, and allow us to glimpse the possibility of Divinity devoid of violence. Faced with the "evils of theodicy," we can in fact be urged, as Sybille Rolf puts it, "gegen Gott zu Gott zu fliehen": "to flee *from* God *to* God." That is, "in the gift of encounter with God, the previous understanding of God can so change (leave), that the very nature [of God] *as love* revealed in the Christ event – omnipotence, goodness, and 'God's omniscience of God' – can open up to us anew."[65]

אבינו מלכנו חטאנו לפניך
אבינו מלכנו החטאת לפנינו
ראה יהוה והביטה למי עוללת כה
אם תאכלנה נשים פרים עללי טפחים
אנכי לא חטאתי לך ואתה עשׂה אתי רעה להלחם בי

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[65] Rolf, "Crux sola est nostra theologia," 239.

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