



THE FULFILMENT OF DOOM?

The Dialogic Interaction between
the Book of Lamentations and the
Pre-Exilic/Early Exilic Prophetic
Literature

ELIZABETH BOASE



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and the Pre-Exilic/Early Exilic Prophetic Literature

Elizabeth Boase



NEW YORK • LONDON

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibInt	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CTM	<i>Concordia Theological Monthly</i>
CurTM	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
Erlsr	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
FOTL	Form s of the Old Testament Literature
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
ITC	International Theological Commentary
JANES	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i> , Supplement Series
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NCB	New Century Bible
NIB	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i> . 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon.
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NRSV	New revised Standard Version
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley and D. E. Green. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974—

- TLOT* *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Edited by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann. Translated by M. E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrikson, 1997
- VT* *Vetus Testamentum*
- WBC* Word Biblical Commentary
- ZAW* *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
- ZTK* *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. *Introduction*

The theology of the book of Lamentations has long been a vexed question for biblical scholars. With its strong expression of grief, suffering and anger, and its seemingly random images of destruction and despair juxtaposed against confessions of sin and expressions of hope, the book has defied attempts to draw together a “cohesive” statement of its theological position or thrust. Conversations continue as to the nature of the theological expression within Lamentations, a conversation into which the present work enters.

Over the past fifty years, there has been an increased interest in the theological content of the book. Early studies on Lamentations gave scant attention to its theology, focusing instead on issues of provenance and form. It was not until 1954, with the publication of Norman Gottwald’s monograph *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, that the theology of the book became a central focus for study.¹ Since this time, there has been considerable debate as to the book’s theology, a trend reflected in the increased space given to the discussion of theology in both commentaries and articles concerning the book.²

One of Gottwald’s key conclusions was that Lamentations belongs within the theological framework of the prophetic literature. Gottwald identifies several features of the text which point to its prophetic orientation, including its references to the day of Yahweh, and its linking of the destruction of Jerusalem with the causal sins of the people.³ Although Gottwald’s views have not been accepted without debate,⁴ the link between Lamentations and the prophetic literature is frequently noted.⁵

1. Norman K. Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations* (London: SCM Press, 1954).

2. By way of an extreme example, T. Meek (“Lamentations,” *IB* 6:3–38 [5–6]) sums up the theology of Lamentations in one brief paragraph, whereas F. Dobbs-Allsopp (*Lamentations* [IBC; Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 2002]) devotes 25 pages to his discussion of the theology of the book.

3. Gottwald, *Studies*, 63–89, 111–18.

4. See, e.g., Bertil Albrektson, *Studies in the Text and Theology of the Book of Lamentations* (Lund: Gleerup, 1963), 215–39.

5. William McKane, *Tracts for the Times: Ruth, Esther, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (London: Abingdon, 1965), 55; Peter R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century BC* (London: SCM Press, 1968), 44; R. K. Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1973), 201–2; Robert R. Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations: A Study, Modern Translation and Commentary* (New

While previous studies have identified motifs shared between Lamentations and the prophetic literature, little attention has been given to the nature of the relationship between the two bodies of literature. Too often it has been presupposed or assumed that because Lamentations uses motifs from the prophetic literature it also shares a common theological outlook. The question of what happens when prophetic motifs are taken up and used within this new context has not been asked, nor has it been explored how it is this new text differs from its prophetic predecessors.⁶

In noting the absence of detailed research on the link between Lamentations and the prophetic literature, two further limitations in the discussion of Lamentations as a prophetically oriented theological text emerge. First, in arguing that Lamentations aligns itself with “prophetic” theology, there is a tendency to reduce the prophetic literature to a single theological outlook. Differences within and between the prophetic books with regard to their use of key motifs and themes have seldom been taken into account in relation to the theology of Lamentations, leading to a flattened interpretation of Lamentations, and, in itself, doing an injustice to the diversity of prophetic material within the Hebrew Bible.⁷

Second, this tendency to reduce the complexity of the prophetic literature to simple assertions corresponds with a similar trend in much of the research on Lamentations. In the period following Gottwald’s publication, many attempts were made to explain the theology of the book through the identification of a single theme or argument. The text itself has, however, frustrated these attempts, as the book defies being straight-jacketed by simplistic theological statements. The attempt to find a unifying theme has only resulted in a diminished understanding of the text which does not do full justice to its theological complexity. Only in recent years has there been a movement away from the quest for the

York: Ktav, 1974), 125–26; Delbert R. Hillers, “History and Poetry in Lamentations,” *CurTM* 10 (1983): 155–61 (161); Francis Landy, “Lamentations,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 329–34 (329); Norman K. Gottwald, “Lamentations,” in *Harper’s Bible Commentary* (ed. James L. Mays; San Francisco: Harper, 1988), 646–51 (648); Robert B. Salters, *Jonah and Lamentations* (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 98; Claus Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 78, 224–25, 230; F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Tragedy, Tradition and Theology in the Book of Lamentations,” *JSOT* 74 (1997): 29–60 (47); J. Renkema, *Lamentations* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 3; Deryn Guest, “Hiding Behind the Naked Woman in Lamentations: A Recriminative Reading,” *BiblInt* 7 (1999): 413–48 (413); Dale Patrick, *The Rhetoric of Revelation in the Hebrew Bible* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 166; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part II and Lamentations* (FOTL; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 476; Kathleen M. O’Connor, “Lamentations,” *NIB* 6:1011–72 (1020); idem, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (New York: Orbis, 2002), 6.

6. Commenting on the frequent association made between Lamentations and the prophetic literature, I. Gous (“A Survey of Research on the Book of Lamentations,” *OTE* 5 [1992]: 184–205 [189]) asks: “do similarities and even quotations inevitably mean consent? Do commentators really take into account how a quotation from, or reference to, other literature functions in the new context?”

7. Gous (“Survey of Research,” 188) asks “Can one talk about ‘the prophets’ as if they were a homogeneous group with corresponding backgrounds, points of departure, points of view and messages? What are the criteria necessary to describe one as ‘prophetic’? Is the acknowledgment that the catastrophe of 586 BC was punishment for sin reason enough?”

theological key to Lamentations, to an increasing recognition that various viewpoints are expressed within Lamentations, thus leading to a more nuanced interpretation of the book's theology.⁸

This study enters into the debate concerning Lamentations' theology, seeking to address some of the above issues. It aims to explore in detail the nature of the relationship between Lamentations and the eighth- to sixth-century prophetic literature in order to understand how it is that Lamentations makes use of the prophetic themes and motifs which occur within it. Then, having explored this relationship, it seeks to consider how this impacts upon our understanding of the theology of the book as a whole. In keeping with the recent trend of identifying a variety of viewpoints within Lamentations, this study seeks to understand how it is that the prophetic themes and motifs identified are integrated into and interact with other viewpoints within the text, and how these work together to form the complex and diverse theological outlook of this book.

1.2. *History of Interpretation*

For ease and clarity of discussion, the history of interpretation can be divided into two broad areas: issues concerning date, authorship and poetic form; and the discussion of theology. Although the primary concern of the current study is the theology of Lamentations, it is helpful to review briefly the debate over authorship and dating in order to situate the discussion of the book's theology. Discussion of poetic form/genre will be picked up later in the chapter when the structure of Lamentations is discussed. While it has been noted that the debate surrounding the theology of the book came to the fore following Gottwald's publication in 1954, issues of date and authorship continue to be discussed down to the present day, and scattered reference to theology is present in the literature prior to 1954.

1.2.1. *The Date and Authorship of Lamentations*

Much of the discussion concerning Lamentations in the period leading up to, and in fact beyond, Gottwald's publication is dominated by issues of authorship, date and poetic form, with the decisions made by various commentators impacting upon their interpretive position concerning the book. For current purposes, it is sufficient to outline the major trends in the discussion, noting those who support the various positions argued.

With regard to date, there is, on the whole, widespread agreement that Lamentations emerges in the period following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. What varies in the discussion is whether any of the chapters can be considered to have emerged either earlier than 586, or significantly later.

With regard to an earlier dating for some of the material, W. Rudolph argues that Lam 1 emerges from the period following 597 BCE. He bases his argument on his observation that ch. 1 does not make reference to the actual destruction of

8. See the discussion below.

the temple and city, but reflects instead the conquest of the city.⁹ Rudolph's view does not find wide support, but is followed by A. Weiser and P. Re'em. ¹⁰

More common is the view that all the book emerges from the period following the destruction, but that some of the chapters are later than others. Of those who argue for a later date of some of the material, ch. 3 is most frequently cited as later, followed by ch. 5. A later date for ch. 3 was proposed as early as 1898 by K. Budde, followed by M. Löhr in 1904.¹¹ This position finds many supporters, with some dating the chapter into the post-exilic period.¹² Chapter 5 has similarly been dated later,¹³ with S. Lachs pushing it as far forward as the Maccabean period.¹⁴

A number of commentators argue, however, that there is little conclusive evidence upon which to date any of the book. There are no specific references to either events or people, and while the images would point to the destruction of Jerusalem as the event behind the laments, the evidence is not conclusive. The book is informed, however, by reading it against this background.¹⁵ F. Dobbs-Allsopp has, however, provided a detailed evaluation of linguistic evidence within Lamentations which points to it being a product of the sixth century, dating no later than 520 BCE, a position followed by A. Berlin.¹⁶

Closely related to the issue of date is that of authorship. Following the superscript in the LXX version of Lamentations, and the reference to his lament over the destroyed city in 2 Chr 35:25, the prophet Jeremiah was for many years

9. Wilhelm Rudolph, *Die Klagelieder: übersetzt und erklärt* (Leipzig: A. Deichert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1939), 5; Wilhelm Rudolph, *Das Buch Ruth: Das Hohe Lied. Die Klagelieder* (Stuttgart: Gutersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1962), 193.

10. A. Weiser, "Klagelieder," in *Das Hohe Lied, Klagelieder, das Buch Ruth, das Buch Esther: Übersetzt und erklärt von Helmer Ringgren und Artur Weiser* (ed. R. H. Ringgren and A. Weiser; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), 39–112 (43); S. Paul Re'em, "The Theology of Hope: A Commentary on Lamentations," in *God's People in Crisis* (ed. R. Martin-Achard and S. Paul Re'em; Edinburgh: Handsel, 1984), 73–134 (80).

11. K. Budde, cited in Westermann, *Lamentations*, 24–25; M. Löhr, "Threni III und die jeremianische Autoschrafft des Buches der Klagelieder," *ZAW* 24 (1904): 1–16.

12. Those who argue for a later date for ch. 3 include, for example, F. Nötscher, and E. Dhorme (cited in Westermann, *Lamentations*, 32, 36); M. Haller, "Klagelieder," in *Die fünf Megilloth: Ruth, Hoheslied, Klagelieder, Esther, Prediger Solomo* (ed. M. Haller and K. Gallinger; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1948), 91–113 (94); Hans Jochen Boecker, *Klagelieder* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1985), 14–15; Wesley J. Fuerst, *The Books of Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Songs, Lamentations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 212; Westermann, *Lamentations*, 105.

Those who date ch. 3 in the exilic period include: Meek, "Lamentations," 5; Otto Kaiser, "Klagelieder," in *Sprüche, Prediger, Das Hohe Lied, Klagelieder, das Buch Ruth: Übersetzt und Erklärt* (ed. H. Ringgren, W. Zimmerli and O. Kaiser; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 291–386 (301).

13. Weiser, "Klagelieder," 43; E. Dhorme, cited in Westermann, *Lamentations*, 37.

14. Samuel T. Lachs, "The Date of Lamentations," *JQR* 57 (1966): 46–56.

15. Iain Provan, *Lamentations* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 11; O'Connor, "Lamentations," 6:1015.

16. F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Linguistic Evidence for the Date of Lamentations," *JANES* 26 (1998): 1–36; Adele Berlin, *Lamentations* (OTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 35.

considered to be the author of the book. That Jeremiah was not the author was first suggested by H. van der Hardt in 1712, although it is with Thenius in 1855 that the debate over authorship became central.¹⁷ Following from Thenius' rejection of Jeremiah as author, Budde argued for multiple authorship of the book, with Löhr, who published a number of articles and commentaries on Lamentations between 1893 and 1923, following Budde's lead.¹⁸ In the twentieth century only H. Weismann and W. Kaiser support Jeremiah as author.¹⁹ Despite the rejection of Jeremian authorship, many commentators note the affinity between sections of Lamentations and the persona of Jeremiah, particularly in Lam 3.²⁰ Löhr, for example, notes that in Lam 3:48–51 the speaker is Jeremiah "who has been chosen by the anonymous author to deliver a kind of penitential sermon."²¹ Recent scholars have argued that Jeremiah is a persona whose voice can be heard within Lamentations. Berlin, following the work of N. Lee, states:

If we hear a speaking voice in the book, and that voice uses the language and imagery of Jeremiah, who better to imagine uttering those words than Jeremiah, the same persona of the book of Jeremiah, the prophet of the destruction and exile *par excellence*.²²

Although there is widespread acceptance that Jeremiah is not the author of the book, debate continues as to whether Lamentations comes from the hand of only one author or more. This discussion is closely tied to issues of date, and includes discussion on the likely background (i.e. court singer, cult, prophetic circle etc.) of the author.

Those who argue for one or more chapters coming from later time periods support multiple authorship of the book.²³ Factors taken into account by those who argue for multiple authorship include the difference in alphabetical order of the א and ב stanzas between ch. 1, and chs. 2, 3 and 4, the change of style in ch. 5, including the absence of the acrostic form, and the different theological outlook

17. Cited in Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 592–93.

18. Cited in Westermann, *Lamentations*, 25–28.

19. H. Weismann cited in J. Hunter, *Faces of a Lamenting City: The Development and Coherence of the Book of Lamentations* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996). Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *A Biblical Approach to Personal Suffering* (Chicago: Moody, 1982), 25–29. See T. Meek ("Lamentations," 5) and R. Salters (*Lamentations*, 93–99) for the arguments against Jeremiah as author.

20. E.g. Gottwald, *Studies*, 74; Rudolph, *Die Klagelieder*, 227–45; Berlin, *Lamentations*, 32. O. Kaiser, cited M. Saebo, "Who is 'the Man' in Lamentations 3? A Fresh Approach to the Interpretation of the Book of Lamentations," in *Understanding Poets and Prophets* (ed. A. G. Auld; JSOTSup 152; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 294–306 (299).

21. Cited in Gottwald, *Studies*, 38.

22. Berlin, *Lamentations*, 32.

23. Those who argue for multiple authorship include Meek, "Lamentations," 5; Lachs, "Date of Lamentations"; Jeffery H. Tigay, "Lamentations, Book of," *EJ* 10:1367–75 (1374); Gordis, *Lamentations*, 125–27; Re'em, "Theology of Hope," 79; Gottwald, "Lamentations," 541–42; Boecker, *Klagelieder*, 13–15; Westermann, *Lamentations*, 221–22. R. Brandscheidt (*Gotteszorn und Menschenleid: Die Gerichtsklage des leidenden Gerichten in Klagelieder 3* [Trier: Paulinus, 1983], 21–32) argues for multiple authorship but redactional unity, while Renkema (*Lamentations*, 52–54) argues that there is a unity which emerges from the book's production by a group of temple singers.

of ch. 3. Although Rudolph argues that ch. 1 is earlier, and that the other chapters were produced at different times, he maintains single authorship.²⁴

A number of commentators, however, argue that the book arose from the one author.²⁵ In arguing for single authorship, several commentators have attempted to define a structural unity across the book, including W. Shea, who argues that the whole book is modelled on the 3:2 qinah meter, and B. Johnson who argues that the book has a carefully designed structure, with each chapter divided into a “fact half” and an “interpretation half.”²⁶

As with the issue of date, a number of commentators acknowledge that there is insufficient evidence upon which to base decisions about authorship.²⁷ Although the text does not allow decisions to be made as to whether it comes from a single or multiple authors, Hillers, Dobbs-Allsopp, O’Connor and Berlin argue that the book should be read as if it were a unity.²⁸ As Berlin states, reading the book as one with unity allows it to be understood “as a coherent whole conveying a multifaceted picture of the destruction.”²⁹

1.2.2. *The Theology of Lamentations*

A review of the discussion concerning the theology of Lamentations can be divided into two periods separated by the ground-breaking publication of Gottwald’s *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*.³⁰ This was the first time that the book’s theology was discussed in any detail, and the literature subsequent to Gottwald’s book reflects an increased interest in, and debate over, the nature of Lamentations’ theological intent.

1.2.2.1. *The Discussion Prior to 1954.* Discussion of the book’s theology is limited in early studies on Lamentations and, if it was discussed at all, occurs in either short introductory comments, or is to be found in scattered comments within the textual analysis. In his 1898 commentary, Budde does not discuss the theological implications of the book at all.³¹ Rudolph argues that the significance

24. Wilhelm Rudolph, “Der Text der Klagelieder,” *ZAW* 56 (1938): 101–22 (101–5); idem, *Die Klagelieder*, 91–92.

25. McKane, *Tracts for the Times*, 43; Otto Plöger, *Die Klagelieder* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1969), 129–30; Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 98; Weiser, “Klagelieder,” 43–44; M. D. Guinan, “Lamentations,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (ed. R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmeyer, and R. E. Murphy; London: Chapman, 1990), 558–62 (558); Salters, *Lamentations*, 98; Hunter, *Faces*, 49.

26. William H. Shea, “The Qinah Structure of the Book of Lamentations,” *Bib* 60 (1972): 103–7; Bo Johnson, “Form and Message in Lamentations,” *ZAW* 97 (1985): 58–73. See R. Salters (“Searching for Patterns in Lamentations,” *OTE* 11 [1998]: 93–104) for further discussion. Salters rejects both these proposals on the basis that they force the text into patterns which are not present.

27. Hans Joachim Kraus, *Klagelieder* (Neukirchen: Neukirchen Kreis Moers, 1956); Fuerst, *Lamentations*, 212; E. R. Daglish, *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (Nashville: Broadman, 1983), 141–42; Provan, *Lamentations*, 15–17.

28. Delbert R. Hillers, *Lamentations* (AB 7A; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 14; Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 5; O’Connor, *Tears of the World*, 13–14; Berlin, *Lamentations*, 6, 32.

29. Berlin, *Lamentations*, 6.

30. Gottwald, *Studies*.

31. Cited Westermann, *Lamentations*, 24–25.

of Lamentations lies in the recognition that the destruction was at the hand of Yahweh, and that the book's purpose was to lead people to a proper understanding of the events, with the hope of ch. 3 intended to provide a way for the people to move through the crisis.³² M. Haller similarly argues that ch. 3 has central importance in providing hope, and that within the chapter the penitential motif is of prime import.³³ These early studies emphasize the recognition of guilt by Israel, and place central importance on the third chapter with its call to penitence and message of hope.

1.2.2.2. *N. Gottwald's Studies in the Book of Lamentations.* Gottwald's publication of *Studies in the Book of Lamentations* brought the theology of the book into the spotlight for the first time. The ground-breaking nature of Gottwald's work was not so much what he said, but that he asked the question of theology at all. There has been considerable engagement with Gottwald's conclusions since this time.

Locating the book of Lamentations against the destruction of Jerusalem and the unprecedented suffering in the community, Gottwald seeks to determine the theological key to the book. The theological significance of Lamentations lies in its "bold and forthright statement of the problem of national disaster and its grappling with issues of faith in light of the historical crisis."³⁴ In seeking to understand the catastrophe of 586, Gottwald argues that it was necessary for the people to look to both their past and their future in order to answer the questions raised by the destruction of Jerusalem.³⁵ Gottwald suggests that behind Lamentations lies an increasing tension between the dominant theology of the Deuteronomistic (Dtr) school with its "naive theory of retribution and reward,"³⁶ and historical reality. Arguing that in the light of the Josianic reform the nation expected a bright future and yet history took the nation's path in different directions, Gottwald suggests that the optimism of the Dtr reform was discrepant with the cynicism and despondency evoked by the reversal of national fortune following the death of Josiah. The key question behind Lamentations is "why does the nation suffer more than ever before immediately after its earnest attempt at reform?"³⁷

Arising out of this tension, Gottwald argues that Lamentations interprets the fall of Jerusalem in line with the teaching of the prophets. Gottwald outlines several features of the book which place it within the theological stream of the prophetic literature.³⁸ On this point Gottwald is expansive, but also somewhat contradictory. First and foremost, it is the acknowledgment and confession of sin as the ultimate cause of the people's plight which points to the prophetic theological stance of the book. Gottwald states:

32. Ibid., 29–31.

33. Ibid., 31.

34. Gottwald, *Studies*, 48.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., 50.

37. Ibid., 51.

38. Ibid., 114–15.

The confession of sin, not once or twice but repeatedly, not perfunctorily or incidentally but earnestly and fundamentally, suggests the reason for the calamity. All five poems which comprise the Book of Lamentations witness to the prophetic concept of sin and thus form one link in the long chain of evidence bearing out the importance of Lamentations as a justification and preservation of the teaching of the prophets.³⁹

It is here, however, that Gottwald's argument also becomes unclear. In discussing Lam 4:6, which compares Jerusalem with Sodom, Gottwald states "The special import of the Lamentations reference is that it reasons from the punishment to the sin in keeping with the most unerring Deuteronomistic faith."⁴⁰ What is unclear is the distinction between the theology of the prophets and that of the Dtr school. Gottwald argues that both function in a retributive framework, and thus his distinction between the two bodies of literature is not clear, despite his argument that Lamentations adheres to the prophetic teaching as a response to the tension with the Dtr theology.

Gottwald finds further evidence of a link with the prophetic literature in the portrayal of Yahweh's wrathful action against the nation, particularly as it is expressed through the description of the destruction as a day of Yahweh (1:12; 2:1, 21, 22), thus confirming the prophetic conviction that it would be a day of doom for Israel.⁴¹ In addition, Gottwald argues that the call to wait passively on Yahweh (3:21–39) is the legacy of the preaching of Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah "who believed that resignation to the foe and/or quiet trust in Yahweh was the only true course of action in the light of the divine control of history."⁴² This is linked with the loyalty to Yahwism demonstrated in the book, "firmly rejecting all temptations to syncretism."⁴³ Finally, hope within Lamentations is linked with the belief in Yahweh's control of history.⁴⁴

In summarizing the prophetic influence on Lamentations, Gottwald argues that it is unique in its assertion of the explosive and destructive side of divine nature and "the determination and ability of Yahweh to act in history in fulfilment of his announced word."⁴⁵ Israel's doom was a consequence of a long-proclaimed and inevitable requital of disobedience and rebellion. He argues "that the book of Lamentations was the first to take up the prophet's theme in the wake of the tragedy they announced and to vindicate their claims."⁴⁶ The acceptance of this prophetic interpretation of the national tragedy was the key to survival.

Despite his emphasis on the prophetic influence on Lamentations, Gottwald also identifies the presence of other theological strands within the book. In its grappling with the meaning of the immense suffering, Gottwald argues that Lamentations "stands at the point in Israel's life where the tension between

39. *Ibid.*, 67.

40. *Ibid.*, 66.

41. *Ibid.*, 83–87.

42. *Ibid.*, 114.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*, 115.

45. *Ibid.*, 89.

46. *Ibid.*

history and faith is, for the first time, most sharply posed.” Although it accepts the 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.”⁴⁷

1.2.2.3. *The Discussion after 1954.* Gottwald’s approach to the theology of Lamentations sought to determine which of Israel’s theological traditions the book drew on, or aligned itself with, as the key to understanding the book’s theology. In the period following his publication, the discussion can be divided into two major groups: those who sought to define the book’s theology in the light of Israel’s traditions, in essence looking outside the book for the key to its understanding; and those who developed their theological insights from the text of Lamentations itself.

1.2.2.3.1. *Israel’s traditions as the key to the theology of Lamentations.* One of the earliest responses to Gottwald came from B. Albrektson.⁴⁸ Although his book is primarily a philological study, Albrektson includes a chapter on the theology of Lamentations.⁴⁹ Like Gottwald, Albrektson seeks to find the situational key to the book, but argues against Gottwald that the tension lies not with the Deuteronomic faith and historical adversity, but between Zion traditions and the events of history. Albrektson argues that within the Zion tradition the inviolability of Jerusalem was central, a belief which was negated in the destruction of the city. The primary task of Lamentations is, according to Albrektson, “the search for an interpretation of history which could embrace the catastrophe itself and transcend the immediate spectacle of tragedy.”⁵⁰ The book of Lamentations responds to the questions raised by the destruction by firmly attributing the cause of the city’s downfall to the sins of the community. In this way Lamentations stands within the Dtr theological tradition. Albrektson supports his argument by outlining similarities between Lamentations and parts of the book of Deuteronomy, particularly Deut 28 with its list of treaty curses which would come upon the unfaithful people. Central to Albrektson’s argument are the multiple references to sin within Lamentations, references which he argues negate Gottwald’s assumption of the book’s tension with the Dtr understanding of history.

Albrektson’s conclusions have found a degree of support in the literature which followed his publication. B. Johnson argues that within Lamentations the question of how ongoing faith in Yahweh was possible following the destruction of the city is answered through the Dtr faith.⁵¹ R. Brandscheidt, whose work focuses on Lam 3 as the central chapter for understanding the book, identifies the book within the Dtr traditions, but notes also that Lamentations points to the destruction of the city as the fulfilment of the prophetic announcement of

47. Ibid., 51.

48. Albrektson, *Text and Theology*.

49. Ibid., 215–39.

50. Ibid., 215.

51. Johnson, “Form and Message,” 59–60.

judgment.⁵² Others who support Albrektson's conclusions include M. Guinan, M. Saebo, and R. Salters.⁵³

Gottwald and Albrektson and his followers sought the answer to the book's theology through identifying a single key or tradition behind the book. Although still looking to Israel's traditions to understand the book's theology, a number of commentators argue that Lamentations draws on more than one tradition, and that no single tradition is adequate to explain the book's outlook.

J. Tigay identifies a number of traditions present within Lamentations, including wisdom and Dtr traditions. In direct opposition to Gottwald, however, Tigay rejects the presence of any prophetic theology within Lamentations, based on both the absence of specific reference to sin within the book, suggesting a failure on the author's behalf to account for the calamity, and on the apparent previous reliance of the author on institutions such as the temple (Lam 1:4, 10; 2:1, 6, 7) and popular religion, a confidence condemned particularly in Jeremiah.⁵⁴ Tying ch. 3 to wisdom traditions, Tigay argues that this chapter is the core of the book which reflects on the meaning of suffering and the recognition that the suffering was due to the guilt of the people. This insight forms the basis of national reassessment and hope.

In two later publications, Gottwald identifies the limitation of his own earlier conclusions in emphasizing a single theological tradition behind the book.⁵⁵ He states:

Anyone adhering to the conventions of a single theological tradition could not have woven the web of poetic argument in Lamentations. Strict prophetic and Deuteronomic adherents viewed the covenant with God as irrevocably broken. Followers of traditional wisdom tenets had little precedent for grappling with the sociopolitical and religious ramifications of the city's fall. Ardent Davidic-Zion loyalists could not abide the breach of the unconditional promises to the holy city, its temple and king. Those who thought that Judah's regime and society were just (or at least) as good or better than those of other nation's would not have understood or sympathized with the notion that "sins" explained Judah's sad end.⁵⁶

In a study which bases its arguments on W. Brueggemann's work on the streams of tradition in the Hebrew Bible,⁵⁷ I. Gous argues that Lamentations originates out of the worldview of the Davidic trajectory (order is God-given and people should adhere to that order), but in the light of the catastrophe had to accept the Mosaic trajectory (people contribute to order and have a responsibility to shape reality).⁵⁸ According to Gous,

52. Brandscheidt, *Gotteszorn und Menschenlied*.

53. Guinan, "Lamentations"; Saebo, "Who is 'the Man?'"; Salters, *Lamentations*, 111.

54. Tigay, "Lamentations, Book of."

55. Gottwald, "Lamentations"; idem, "The Book of Lamentations Reconsidered," in his *The Hebrew Bible in its Social World and Ours* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 165-73 (171-73).

56. Gottwald, "Lamentations," 648.

57. Walter Brueggemann, "Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel," *JBL* 98 (1979): 161-85.

58. Gous, "Survey of Research," 191.

They [i.e. the poets] and their audience, who experienced and survived the catastrophe of 586 BC, were adherents to the theology of Zion. While reflecting upon their experiences, they had to concede the Mosaic-minded explanations of the events as punishment for sins. However the motif did not function as a call for repentance. True to the thought patterns of the Davidic trajectory, it served as an affirmation of orderliness. The poems thus were intended to reaffirm the validity of the Davidic world view.⁵⁹

Although he uses different terminology, Gous's argument identifies similar traditions to Albrektson. Unlike Albrektson, however, he argues that the Zion/Davidic traditions are affirmed within Lamentations.

J. Renkema also argues for multiple traditions behind Lamentations. In his commentary, Renkema identifies the importance of both the prophetic and psalmic/Zion traditions within the book.⁶⁰ In attempting to understand theologically the "why" of the catastrophe, Renkema argues that "Their [i.e. the poets] harking back to the preaching of those prophets who had announced the fall of Jerusalem and their appropriation of some of their language and motifs shows that they had found an answer therein."⁶¹ The ongoing acknowledgment of Yahweh and the expression of faith evident through the recourse to laments represents the survival of an element of Psalm theology, a theology that has within it notions of Zion's inviolability.⁶² According to Renkema, within Lamentations "doubts were raised in prayer as to the absolute character of the prophetic announcements of doom while at the same time distance had to be taken from the notion of Zion's unconditional inviolability."⁶³ In this context, Renkema argues, "the insight arose that YHWH had allowed his presence in their midst to be dependent on the purity of their relationship with him."⁶⁴ Against Albrektson, Renkema argues that there is an absence of clear Deuteronomistic influence within Lamentations.⁶⁵

Much of Renkema's work is picked up and supported by J. Hunter, who similarly argues that Zion theology continues to be present in Lamentations. Against Renkema, however, Hunter identifies more emphasis on hope within Lamentations, a hope which arises from a Dtr understanding in which restoration is possible if the people confess their sin and remain faithful to Yahweh.⁶⁶

Although the later work of Dobbs-Allsopp will be discussed below, in his 1997 article "Tragedy, Tradition and Theology in the Book of Lamentations," Dobbs-Allsopp identifies a number of theological traditions within Lamentations, including Dtr theology, the prophetic concept of sin, the wisdom tradition and the Zion tradition. These traditions help to form the ethical vision of the book, but do so for a purpose different to that generally perceived. Dobbs-Allsopp states: "One does not doubt that Lamentations reflects a general awareness of the ethical vision

59. Ibid.

60. Renkema, *Lamentations*.

61. Ibid., 44.

62. Ibid., 57.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., 58.

66. Hunter, *Faces*, 145.

as manifested in these several literary traditions. What is open to question is the nature of the poet's use of this material."⁶⁷ Dobbs-Allsopp goes on to argue that the text of Lamentations undermines this ethical vision, and that the ethical vision acts as a foil for the poet's "more tragic take on the situation."⁶⁸ The poet does not disparage the ethical vision as such, 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."⁶⁹ In a move which leads into his later work, and into the discussion below on Lamentations as a multivalent text, Dobbs-Allsopp identifies four issues central to the theology of Lamentations: the valuation of human suffering; the authentication of human defiance; the desire for human and divine compassion and the theological relevance of aesthetics; a reference to the ability of Lamentations to "heal through language."⁷⁰

Finally, although acknowledging that Lamentations presents different perspectives on the destruction of Jerusalem, Berlin also looks to Israel's traditions in her understanding of the book's theology.⁷¹ In her discussion, Berlin acknowledges that the book does not construct a theology, or present the theology of its day in any systematic way. Rather, it "assumes the 'theology of destruction' in which destruction and exile are the punishment for sin."⁷² Berlin's understanding of the theology of Lamentations revolves around the presence of two paradigms within the book's understanding: the paradigm of purity; and the political paradigm. With regard to purity/impurity, Berlin argues that this paradigm aligns itself with the Priestly material as presented within Leviticus and Numbers, and concerns the defilement of the land through the moral impurity of the community.⁷³ The political paradigm draws on Deuteronomic models of covenant and suzerainty treaty relationships between Yahweh and Israel.⁷⁴ Berlin concludes, "Both the paradigm of purity and the political paradigm converge in their view that the exile is the ultimate punishment for the most serious sins. It is, therefore, easy to understand how prophets and poets could fuse the two paradigms together as they are in Lamentations."⁷⁵

1.2.2.3.2. *The theology as it emerges from within the text.* A second body of literature concerning the theology of Lamentations looks not primarily to Israel's traditions in order to understand the book's theology, but seeks to find the theology from within the text alone. It is possible to separate these studies into two major groups: those which seek to define the book's theology through a single purpose or theme, and those which identify multiple themes/voices.

67. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy," 46.

68. *Ibid.*, 47.

69. *Ibid.*

70. *Ibid.*, 54, 58.

71. Berlin, *Lamentations*.

72. *Ibid.*, 18.

73. *Ibid.*, 19–21.

74. *Ibid.*, 21–22.

75. *Ibid.*, 22.

1.2.2.3.2.1. *Defining Lamentations through a single theological theme.* Of those who seek to define the theology of Lamentations as it emerges out of the text itself, the most common response is to seek a single theological statement or purpose through which the book can be understood. This approach seeks to define the most dominant or central thrust/purpose of the book, although those who take this approach often recognize that a variety of viewpoints are expressed within the book. It is, however, this variety of viewpoints within Lamentations which frustrates the attempt to define its theological message through a single theme or statement. The literature can be divided into three broad groups: those who identify the recognition of guilt and the confession of sin as the book's primary purpose; those who identify the movement from despair to hope as the book's purpose thus focusing on ch. 3 as the theological core of the book; and those who understand the book's aim to reside in the expression of suffering itself. The first two themes—the recognition of guilt and the instilling of hope—are often considered as two aspects of the one purpose, that is, as the way out of the current crisis of faith to a new understanding of Yahweh.

The most common position taken on the theology of Lamentations is that its significance lies in the recognition of guilt and the acknowledgment that sin was the cause of Yahweh's destructive action, a recognition frequently associated with an acceptance of the teaching of the prophets.⁷⁶ Closely related to this is the identification of ch. 3 as the theological core of Lamentations, with its expression of patient waiting on Yahweh, the affirmation of Yahweh's mercy and its call to penitence offering hope to the community and a way through the present catastrophe. While these two aspects are often seen as parts of the same theological purpose, some commentators place more emphasis on the hope than on the recognition of guilt.⁷⁷ Frequently, when emphasis is placed on the recognition of guilt and the transition to hope, the expression of suffering and pain is relegated as being of lesser importance, or given no significance at all. This understanding of Lamentations is typified by T. Meek, who confines his introductory comments on theology to the following statement:

The book of Lamentations was written, not simply to memorialize the tragic destruction of Jerusalem, but to interpret the meaning of God's rigorous treatment of his people, to the end that they would learn the lessons of the past and retain their faith in him in the face of overwhelming disaster. There is deep sorrow over the past, and some complaint, but there is also radiant hope for the future, particularly in chapter 3.⁷⁸

In making this connection between the confession of sin and the penitential hope of ch. 3, the theology of Lamentations becomes an orthodox expression of human culpability in the face of a righteous God. As will be seen, however, there is an

76. Weiser, "Klagelieder," 304–6; McKane, *Tracts for the Times*, 53–57; Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 200–3; Fuerst, *Lamentations*, 207, 262; Kaiser, "Klagelieder."

77. Plöger, *Die Klagelieder*, 128–29; Boecker, *Klagelieder*, 15–17; Joze Krasovec, "The Source of Hope in Lamentations," *VT* 42 (1992): 221–33. See also H. J. Kraus (cited Westermann, *Lamentations*, 35). Kraus does not discuss theology as a separate issue in the first edition of his commentary (Kraus, *Klagelieder*).

78. Meek, "Lamentations," 5–6.

emerging recognition that the theology of Lamentations is more complex and multi-voiced than this interpretation would suggest.

Against this more dominant trend of identifying the recognition of guilt and the call to penitence and hope as the central thrust of Lamentations, a number of commentators place central importance on the expression of pain and suffering. Although still attempting to define the theology of the book through one central idea or thrust, this line of interpretation begins to break open the acceptance of Lamentations as an orthodox expression of the destruction as just punishment for sin. As will be seen, however, in some studies there continues to be an emphasis on both the confession of sin and the transition to hope, an emphasis which, in some cases, negates the importance of the expression of suffering.

M. S. Moore criticizes the previous trend in Lamentations' research of seeking to find a single theological thrust through which to define the book.⁷⁹ Moore acknowledges that various themes emerge when considering the theology of Lamentations, but argues that these themes are subservient to a task of larger import. First and foremost, he suggests, Lamentations' task is to lament the national destruction, a lament which is the first step towards picking up the emotional pieces. Having completed an analysis of the "deep structure" of each of the five poems, Moore concludes that the pre-eminent concern of the poet was "to portray the horrifying scope of the human suffering which he had witnessed with his own eyes"⁸⁰ and that as an expression of grief the book becomes the focal-point for the grief of the nation.⁸¹ The laments articulate anger, guilt, despair and stubborn hope, but their primary task remains the expression of suffering.

Re'emmi also argues that the expression of suffering is of central importance within Lamentations.⁸² He suggests that Lamentations served the survivors as a means of expressing their grief and horror. Despite this recognition of the importance of the expression of suffering, however, Re'emmi goes on to stress the centrality of the confession of sin, and of ch. 3 within the book. He argues that the poet recognizes "that God waits until his disloyal people are at least aware that of themselves they are nothing, and that they cannot rescue themselves from the pit into which they have sunk. Yet God's purpose and plan for the world through them will continue—by Grace alone."⁸³ As such, Re'emmi's recognition of the importance of the expression of suffering runs the risk of being overshadowed by his emphasis on guilt and hope.

Although A. Mintz emphasizes the importance of the expression of suffering within Lamentations, his discussion elevates the hope reached by the man of ch. 3 over that expression.⁸⁴ Mintz defines his task as a discussion of the rhetorical measures taken within Lamentations to address three dilemmas faced by the

79. Michael S. Moore, "Human Suffering in Lamentations," *RB* 90 (1983): 535–55.

80. *Ibid.*, 554.

81. *Ibid.*

82. Re'emmi, "Theology of Hope," 75–76.

83. *Ibid.*, 76.

84. Alan Mintz, "The Rhetoric of Lamentations and the Representation of Catastrophe," *Proof-texts* 2 (1982): 1–17, republished in *idem*, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 17–48.

community in the wake of the destruction: “the essentially national-collective nature of the destruction, the trauma to the set of relations determined by the covenant, and the role of poetic language and its producers in the aftermath of the event.”⁸⁵ Mintz then explores the power of language, and particularly the use of the poetic device of personifying the city as female, in allowing the community to bring to expression their communal pain and grief. Despite his valuation of the expression of pain and suffering, Mintz stresses the theological import of the expression of hope by the male figure in Lam 3. Mintz defines Lam 3 as the “monumental center” of Lamentations, the place where reasoning and cognition take over in the quest to understand what has happened.⁸⁶ Central to the reasoning and cognition of this male figure is that a connection is made between sin and the destruction. Mintz states: “Without sin the event has no meaning, God remains gladiator and beast, His persecution an eternal rejection. Chapter 3 demonstrates that precisely because a conviction of sin is at first so unnatural it must be won.”⁸⁷ Although Mintz values the expression of the pain and suffering in the face of the loss of meaning wrought by the destruction, he undervalues that expression in stating,

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.⁸⁸

For Mintz, then, rational theologizing, the acknowledgment of guilt and the expression of hope are the most important expressions within Lamentations.⁸⁹

Hillers also argues that Lamentations serves the survivors of the catastrophe as an expression of the horrors and atrocities of the fall and its aftermath. In his introduction he states that “people live on best after calamity, not by utterly repressing their grief and shock, but by facing it, and by measuring its dimensions.”⁹⁰ Important for Hillers is the poetic form of Lamentations which allows the survivors and their descendants “to remember and contemplate their loss—not coolly, not without emotion—but without unbearable and measureless grief.”⁹¹ Hillers goes on to define one of the dimensions measured in Lamentations as being guilt, arguing that the book is also a confession of guilt and a “testimony to a search for absolution.”⁹² Hillers argues that the poems were written to serve in

85. Mintz, “Rhetoric of Lamentations,” 2.

86. *Ibid.*, 10–11.

87. *Ibid.*, 12.

88. *Ibid.*, 9.

89. See T. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 6–7, for a critique of Mintz’s work.

90. Hillers, *Lamentations*, 4.

91. *Ibid.*, 5.

92. *Ibid.*, 4.

ritual, and that central to the intent of the ritual is the expression and strengthening of hope. Both within his introductory comments, and within the commentary, Hillers places central importance on the speech of the male figure in ch. 3, arguing that he is the representative sufferer through whom the poet “points the way to the nation, as he shows the man who has been through trouble moving into, then out of, near despair to patient faith and penitence, thus becoming a model for the nation.”⁹³ For Hillers, then, ch. 3 is the high point and centre of the book. Although Hillers values the expression of suffering, that expression becomes subservient to the expression of penitence and hope.

A similar tension can be identified in the work of C. Westermann.⁹⁴ Contrary to many scholars, Westermann argues against interpreting the book of Lamentations in light of ch. 3, arguing instead for the importance of the expression of the lament itself. According to Westermann, ch. 3 was composed later than the remaining chapters, and its inclusion within the collection transforms the poems into a message for the community in the post-exilic era. He suggests that the poet of ch. 3, who is also the compiler of the collection, sought to “recommend for his own time a kind of piety that emphasizes, more strongly than do those laments (i.e. chs. 1–2, 4–5), a deuteronomic spirit of repentance and public confession.”⁹⁵

In a history of interpretation which spans a period of approximately one hundred years, Westermann argues that there has been a consistent undervaluation of the lament form of the poems, a trend which he suggests is the product of a movement in Christian piety away from lament as a “proper” form of expression before God.⁹⁶ In a form-critical study, Westermann maintains the importance of the lament as a means through which the suffering of the community finds its expression. He argues that the laments did not arise in order to solve a problem or answer a question, but arose as “an immediate reaction on the part of those affected by the collapse.”⁹⁷ Against many commentators, Westermann argues that the recognition and acknowledgment of sin is not introduced into the laments by the speakers to persuade the community as to its truth, but is an acknowledgment which is presupposed by the poets.⁹⁸

Despite Westermann’s insistence that the sin of the community is presupposed by the poets, he does place heavy emphasis on the references to sin and guilt throughout the book, particularly in his commentary on chs. 1 and 2. This tension in Westermann’s discussion is captured by T. Linafelt, who states:

It is disappointing then to find that while Westermann has managed to break the hold of chapter 3 on contemporary interpretation and attempts to reclaim the value of lament language, his own reading of chapters 1 and 2 is hardly less pious sounding and conciliatory toward God than those previous scholars. Though he has indicated that

93. *Ibid.*, 122.

94. Westermann, *Lamentations*.

95. *Ibid.*, 230.

96. *Ibid.*, 24–85. See particularly pp. 81–82.

97. *Ibid.*, 81.

98. *Ibid.*, 85.

laments, even though they may acknowledge sin or guilt, are not primarily concerned to convince readers or hearers as such, Westermann works to convince his own readers of the importance of sin and guilt for Lamentations.⁹⁹

This emphasis on sin and guilt is seen in Westermann's discussion of ch. 1, where he argues that special emphasis is placed throughout the chapter on the motif of the acknowledgment of guilt,¹⁰⁰ and the downplaying of any suggestion that elements of accusation against God (e.g. in vv. 12–18) should be read as an indictment of God. He also argues that v. 18, with its vindication of Yahweh, is the high point of ch. 1. Emphasizing his point, Westermann argues:

Just how important the acknowledgment of guilt is for Lam 1 has already been shown (with reference to vv. 5 and 9). Here, at the high point of the whole song, this motif is brought into conjunction with an acknowledgment of the justice of God's ways such that the whole preceding lament is set off: God *must* act in this way, because we have transgressed against his word. When seen in this way, the clause also intimates a significant 'nevertheless.' That is to say, despite our lamenting we still hold fast to the conviction that God is just.¹⁰¹

Again, in discussing ch. 2, Westermann continues to emphasize the importance of the recognition of guilt, despite his acknowledgment of the almost complete absence of reference to sin within the chapter. This recognition of guilt is repeatedly referred to as being in line with the pre-exilic teaching of the prophets of judgment.¹⁰² In his heavy emphasis on the acknowledgment of guilt, Westermann runs the risk of himself undervaluing the lament as a valid form of expression before God.

A common feature of the interpretations discussed within this section is the attempt to define the major purpose or thrust of the book through one theme or theological purpose. This attempt has, however, been unsuccessful because the text of Lamentations has frustrated the attempt to define it by a single theological statement or purpose. This difficulty is reflected by the fact that most of the above commentators have found it necessary to acknowledge that there are other theological expressions within the book, despite their giving precedence to one of those expressions. It is this insight which leads into the final section of this overview of the research on Lamentations.

1.2.2.3.2.2. *Lamentations as a multi-voiced book.* As can be seen from the above survey of attempts to see in Lamentations a single theological purpose or thrust, the book has defied these attempts to simplify and confine the many theological expressions within it. Although commentators over the past fifty years have acknowledged that a variety of theological statements are present within the text, recent studies, influenced by the move away from modernist notions of truth, resist the temptation to value one theological viewpoint over others, valuing instead the multiplicity of theological voices within the text.

99. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 14.

100. Westermann, *Lamentations*, 116.

101. *Ibid.*, 135–36 (italics in original).

102. *Ibid.*, 146–59, 230–31.