Ethos 32, no. 4 (128) (2019): 21–43
DOI 10.12887/32-2019-4-128-03

Krzysztof NAPORA

"THERE MAY YET BE HOPE..." (Lam 3:29) Destruction, Suffering, and Hope in the Book of Lamentations

The picture provided by the editors of Lamentations leaves no doubt about the fact that the agent of destruction was the Lord himself, while the emotions of profound sadness, excruciating pain, anger, and burning rage, as well as despair, have been portrayed with an incomparable richness of color. And one must admit that the vivid description of the destruction renders the expression of the extreme emotions both comprehensible and justified. The God who allowed children to die must take into account the outcry of human beings!

In 598 or 597 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, invaded Judah and laid siege to its capital Jerusalem. After a short defense, the city was captured and pillaged, and a great number of its residents were taken into captivity. Those events caused a serious crisis, not only in terms of the political or social life of the period, but also in the aspect of its religious and theological tradition, by provoking dramatic questions: How was it possible that Jerusalem, which used to be "the city of the great King"[1] (Ps 48:2), had been defeated? Had the Lord abandoned his Temple, his city, and his people? Even though the first Babylonian invasion was a serious blow to the Kingdom of Judah, it seemed to have quickly recovered from the shock. Jerusalem was rebuilt after the wartime damage, the economy was revived, the anti-Babylonian party gained allies and waited for a favorable occasion to liberate the country from the occupation. At that time, there was still hope. However, the second invasion in 587 BCE and the fall of Jerusalem, preceded by a year-long siege, put an end to the Kingdom of Judah. The old questions returned and became even more urgent: Why did that happen? Why did God allow his Temple to be destroyed? Is he the true God? Is there still any hope?

Those dramatic questions have been expressed by means of *qinah*: the mourning rhythm of the Book of Lamentations. The editors of Lamentations wrestled with the inexplicability of the tragic human experience, while attempting to express the immense suffering of the crushed city and its inhabitants. In this article, I shall follow that poignant narrative of the successive stages of the destruction of the country and the city, as well as of the suffering of its

[1] Unless otherwise noted, the Biblical citations in this paper are from the *New Standard Version Bible*.

people. In the concluding part of the paper, I shall focus on some theological issues arising from the description provided by the editors of Lamentations. I shall try to join them in asking the question, "Is there still any hope?"

THE PICTURE OF DESTRUCTION

The Book of Lamentations presents the consecutive stages of the destruction caused by the Babylonian army and depicts the concentric circles of devastations caused by the war. Examining this picture, I shall study the destruction of the country, the city, and, finally, of the Temple.

DESTRUCTION OF THE COUNTRY (LAND)

I shall begin the discussion of the tragedy described in the Book of Lamentations, with the outermost circle of destruction depicted by the editor of the book. During the military campaign, the Babylonian army (in fact, neither the Babylonians nor their king Nebuchadnezzar have been openly mentioned in Lamentations[2]) gradually invaded the whole Kingdom of Judah, moving from its border towards its heart: the capital. The traces of that devastating process are reflected in the second song of Lamentations: "The Lord has destroyed without mercy all the dwellings of Jacob; in his wrath he has broken down the strongholds of daughter Judah; he has brought down to the ground in dishonor the kingdom and its rulers" (Lam 2:2).

The verse quoted above enumerates the targets hit by destruction: the dwellings of Jacob, the strongholds of daughter Judah, and lastly the kingdom and its rulers. It is worth noticing that God's anger does not (at least, not directly) focus on human beings. Only at the end of Lamentations 2:2 does the editor introduce "the rulers." "The dwellings of Jacob" (*nə'ôṯ ya'ăqōḇ*) are mentioned first. The noun *nāwe*^{h} indicates dwelling in a general sense (cf. Job 8:6; Ps 68:13; Prv 3:33; 21:20), the shepherd's dwelling (cf. Zep 2:6), the sheepfold, i.e., the place where the sheep are fed and protected at night, enclosed, sheltered, and safe (cf. Prv 24:15; Is 33:20). However, *nāwe*^{h}, can be also used to mean the pasture whereto the shepherd leads his flock (cf. Ez 34:14; Ps 23:2). Thus the term in question can indicate both a (fenced and safe) en-

[2] See Delbert R. H i l l e r s, "History and Poetry in Lamentations," *Currents in Theology and Missions* 10 (1983): 155.

closure and an open space (pasture).[3] This ambivalence appears particularly clear in the prophetic books of the Bible. On the one hand, *nə'ôṯ* is sometimes used to describe safe places ("peaceful folds"—*nə'ôṯ haššālôm*—cf. Is 32:18; Jer 25:37) or places that remain intact even after the destruction of the kingdom (cf. Is 27:10; Ez 25:5; Zep 2:6). On the other hand, however, such places also shared in the fate of the whole country. They were also touched by the flame of God's anger: dried out, abandoned, and destroyed (cf. Jer 10:25; 25:37; Am 1:2).

In Lamentations 2:2, the "dwellings of Jacob" may be used to mean, metaphorically, the inhabited territories (see the use of the term in question in the announcements of salvation in Jeremiah 50:19 and Ezekiel 34:14). The parallelism of the expressions: the "dwellings of Jacob" and the "strongholds of daughter Judah" in Lamentations 2b is also noteworthy. Obviously, those expressions are not synonymous, but together they describe the whole country: the cities and the pastures, i.e., the kingdom mentioned in verse 2c. As Iain W. Provan states, the "dwelling or pastures of Jacob" refers to the country in general, while the "strongholds of Judah" specifies the object of destruction.[4]

The "strongholds of daughter Judah" (*miḇṣərê ḇaṯ yəhûḏāʰ*) are listed as the second destroyed target. The noun *miḇṣār*, "stronghold," comes from the root *bṣr* which means: to cut, to make inaccessible, to fortify.[5] Using this term, the editor alludes to the fortified cities built to protect strategic places and to make access to the capital more difficult. Their names can be found in the second book of Chronicles (cf. 2 Chr 11:5-11) in the context of the description of King Roboam's construction activity. Prophet Jeremiah also mentions two of those cities (Lachish and Azekah) as the resistance points against the Babylonian army (cf. Jer 34:7), the information apparently confirmed by the text of the so-called Lachish ostraca.[6]

The expression "daughter Judah" (*ḇaṯ yəhûḏāʰ*) appears three times in the Book of Lamentations (cf. Lam 1:15; 2:2; 2:5), next to similar expressions, such as the "daughter of Zion," the "daughter of Jerusalem," the "daughter of Edom," and the "daughter of my people." The image of a state, a country, or a city personified as a female figure seems to be very useful. It offers

---

[3] See Francis B r o w n, Samuel R. D r i v e r, and Charles A. B r i g g s, entry נָוֶה, in Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic. Coded with the Numbering System from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 627.

[4] See Iain W. P r o v a n, *Lamentations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 60.

[5] See Francis B r o w n, Samuel R. D r i v e r, and Charles A. B r i g g s, entry בָּצַר, in Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 130–1.

[6] See "The Ostraca of Samaria," trans. William F. Albright, in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 322.

a great variety of possible representations capable of expressing the nuances and shades of meaning (such as, e.g., 'young woman,' 'daughter,' 'virgin,' 'bride,' 'spouse,' 'mother,' or 'widow'). This potential may be among the factors that explained the popularity of the female personification in the Hebrew Bible, as well as in the culture of ancient Near East. Importantly, the "daughter of Judah" seems to have a broader meaning than the "daughter of Zion" or the "daughter of Jerusalem." The latter two expressions designate the city of Jerusalem: the capital of the state, whereas the "daughter of Judah" represents the whole Kingdom of Judah. As mentioned above, it was not only Jerusalem that suffered the consequences of the war. The whole kingdom partook of the tragic fate of the capital[7] and that community of fate is emphasized by the use of verbs describing the process of destruction. The Lord appears to be the subject of the verbs "destroyed" (*billaʿ*) and "showed no mercy" (*lʾ ḥāmal*) [to all the dwellings of Jacob] (cf. 2:2); he has "broken down" (*hāras*) the strongholds of the daughter of Judah, "brought down to the ground" (*higgîaʿ*), and "dishonored" (*ḥillēl*) the rulers of Judah. Three out of these five verbs (*blʿ*, *lʾ ḥml*, and *hrs*) have also been used in the description of the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. Lam 2:16-17, 21). It is worth noting that all the verbs used by the editor in Lamentations 2:2 emphasize violence, impetuosity, haste—almost the fury of action. The picture of destruction becomes even more dramatic once the reader realizes that it was God who inflicted violence on Judah and that, in the Hebrew Bible, violence was attributed to God only thrice (cf. Ps 89:40; Is 47:6; Lam 2:2). The idea of the destruction of the kingdom reappears in Lamentations 2:3–5 where the editor moves from the descriptions of Jerusalem to the images presenting the suffering of the entire country. The geography of the destruction is specified by the use of the names: "Israel" (Lam 2:3.5), "Jacob" (Lam 2:3), and the "daughter of Judah" (Lam 2:5). The narrative is further dramatized with additional verbs referring to the devastation wrought by the Lord. He "has cut down (*gāḏaʿ*) in fierce anger" (Lam 2:3), he "has burnt (*wayyiḇʿar*) like a flaming fire" (Lam 2:3) which "consumes" (*ʾāḵlāʰ*) (cf. Lam 2:3), he has "poured out (*šāpaḵ*) his fury like fire" (Lam 2:4), he "laid in ruins" (*šiḥēṯ*) its strongholds, and multiplied (*wayyereḇ*) in daughter Judah mourning and lamentation" (Lam 2:5). Even though it is the Lord who has caused destruction and acted "like an enemy" (Lam 2:5), the Book of Lamentations mentions also the names of the nations which, in an active or a passive way, contributed to the destruction of the Kingdom of Judah. Among them, the book names the Chaldeans (cf. 2 Kgs 25; 2 Chr 36:19; Jer 37:52), the Ammonites (cf. Ez 25:3), and the inhabitants of Moab (cf. Ez 25:8), Edom (cf. Ez 25:12), and Tyre (cf. Ez 26:2). In this way, the reader is informed that certain neigh-

[7] See Johan R e n k e m a, *Lamentations* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 170.

boring countries took advantage of the Chaldean invasion of the Kingdom of Judah even though they had earlier allied against the Babylonians (cf. Lam 5:2; Jer 27:3), which appears even more painful when we remember that some of those countries (e.g., Edom) were considered as connected to Israel through family ties (cf. Lam 4:21–22).

DESTRUCTION OF THE CITY

The subsequent stage of destruction depicted in the Book of Lamentation is the fall of the city of Jerusalem. The capital of the Kingdom of Judah was captured by the Babylonian troops twice: for the first time, it happened on March 15–16, 597 BCE, when, during the military campaign of Nebuchadnezzar in Judah,[8] the Judean king Jehoiachin surrendered the city (cf. 2 Kgs 24:12; 2 Chr 36:10; Ez 17:12), thus saving it from complete ruin, and, for the second time, in the summer of 587 or 586, after a long siege.[9] Although both defeats led to the destruction of the city narrated in the Lamentations, it was the second capture of Jerusalem that had a decisive impact on the shape of the poetic images included in the book.

One of these images is included in Lamentations 2:8–9a: "The Lord determined to lay in ruins the wall of daughter Zion; he stretched the line; he did not withhold his hand from destroying; he caused rampart and wall to lament; they languish together. Her gates have sunk into the ground; he has ruined and broken her bars." In this extract, the city itself is called "daughter Zion." The editor of the book mentions four architectural elements of the city: the wall, the rampart, the gates, and the bars. During the siege, they were, strategically speaking, the most important strongpoints of the city. Their size itself could discourage or frighten potential enemy and so they were regarded as the guarantee of the safety of the residents. In addition, being the outermost and thus the most visible part of the city and a walkway leading into it, the walls, the ramparts, the gates, and the bars testified to the power, might, and wealth of Jerusalem. Indeed, they might be considered, *pars pro toto*, as the whole Jerusalem, since to capture them meant to defeat the entire city.[10]

---

[8] See "The Conquest of Jerusalem," trans. A. Leo Oppenheim, in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 564; Bustenay O d e d, "Judah and the Exile," in *Israelite and Judean History*, ed. John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986), 471.

[9] For a discussion of the problems concerning the precise chronology see O d e d, "Judah and the Exile," 474–5.

[10] See R e n k e m a, *Lamentations*, 254.

First, the text mentions the wall of Jerusalem. The Hebrew Bible frequently refers to them in different contexts (cf. 1 Kgs 3:1; 9:15; Ps 48:14; Jer 1:15; 2 Kgs 25:4 mentions also the second wall or the double wall). This biblical data has been confirmed by archeological excavations. Kathleen Kenyon, Nahman Avigad, and Yigal Shilo have discovered fragments of the walls and gates, as well as of the towers. The excavations have also revealed that the wall in various parts of the city was three, five or even seven meters high.[11] The editor of Lamentations writes that the city wall was exposed to destruction (*ləhašḥît*). The stem *šḥṯ*, used in the conjugation *pi'el* (cf. Lam 2:5) to describe the destruction of the country, is now used in the *hiph'il* form. Such a choice of form stresses the fact that the destruction was premeditated, accomplished intentionally, with an unwavering determination. The tension in the narrative is intensified even more by the verb *ḥšḇ*, "to intend," "to determine," used with "the Lord" as the subject.[12] It was the Lord who actually intended the destruction, it was him who planned it!

The theme of the wall is resumed in Lam 2:8c, where it is combined with that of the rampart, or bulwark. The verbs used here (*'ḇl* and *'ml*) emphasize the picture of ruins and total damage. As Arnulf Baumann notes, the verb *'ḇl* means "to observe customs of mourning." Due to the destructive intervention of God, the ruins of the wall and of the rampart become a sign of mourning.[13] In Johan Renkema's view, however, that sign might have been an effect of the enemy's efforts to destroy the wall during the siege.[14]

Verse 8 says that the Lord "stretched the line" (*nāṭāʰ qāw*). This is an expression suggestive of a positive enterprise: God's creative work, but also a carpenter's work or the reconstruction of Jerusalem (cf. Is 44:13; Jb 38:5; Jer 31:38; Zec 1:6). In this context, however, the meaning of the phrase resembles that in 2 Kings 21:13, where the biblical author characterized the destruction of the city as "well prepared," "measured," as well as consistently and dispassionately realized. By describing the Lord as the one who did "not withhold his hand from destroying," the author recalls God's saving intervention in 2 Samuel 24:16, when the Lord had stopped the hand of the angel bringing destruction. Now the hand of the destroyer was not restrained!

The final part of the discussed text mentions the city gates and bars. The gates served as the main points of resistance during the siege. Their dimen-

[11] See Yigal S h i l o h, "Jerusalem: The Early Periods and the First Temple Period," in *The New Encyclopedia of Archeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, vol. 2, ed. Ephraim Stern (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Carta, 1993), 706.

[12] See R e n k e m a, *Lamentations*, 251.

[13] See Arnulf B a u m a n, entry אבל, in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. 1, ed. Gerhard J. Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973), 46.

[14] See R e n k e m a, *Lamentations*, 254; Cf. 2 Sam 20:15; 2 Kings 25:10.

sions and security usually exceeded those of the regular wall.[15] Now, when the anger of the Lord struck the city, the gates "sank into the ground," and the bars were "ruined and broken" (Lam 2:9). As Renkema notes, when the verb *'bd* refers to a material object, it is often connected with the cult of idols.[16] This seems surprising in the context of Jerusalem, the Holy City. However, the use of the verb in question may also indicate the true source and the cause of God's wrath, i.e., the idolatrous confidence placed in the Holy City by the people of Judah.

It is worth noting that the sequence of verbs itself indicates the continuous progress of destruction. In this way, the editor depicts—reconstructing the order of events almost exactly as they happened—the agony of Jerusalem. The image again emphasizes the personification of the city (which we have addressed, while discussing the expression "the daughter of Zion"). The editor of the book enhances the personification even more by showing a resemblance of the 'actions' of the city to those of the people. Inanimate objects in the city are described as 'acting' as if they were its residents: the wall and the ramparts mourn and bend to the ground—exactly as do the elders of the city in Lamentations 2:10. Such a description, on the one hand, testifies to the common destiny of the city and its inhabitants. On the other hand, it also indicates that the whole truth about the destruction of Jerusalem can be expressed only by means of images and metaphors normally used to describe human suffering. Such a choice of images and metaphors is evident from the very beginning of the book. In Lamentations 1:1, the unpopulated city is compared to a widow who lost not only her husband, but also her children; in other words, she was deprived of any support and care. This picture seems to aptly express the situation of the city after the siege: its residents died in battle (cf. Lam 3:21-22) or were taken captive (cf. Lam 1:5). The city of Jerusalem, destroyed during the war, was deprived of any protection and lay in ruin (cf. Neh 1:3; 3:11-14.17).

In Lamentations 1:8, the editor speaks of the "nakedness"[17] of Jerusalem. In the Hebrew Bible, "nakedness" has an extremely wide semantic field. Very often, the meaning of the word focuses on the concepts of shame and misfortune. Stripping of clothes was used as a punishment inflicted on adulterous women. Now Jerusalem was stripped of its garments, i.e., of the walls, the ramparts, and the city gates (cf. Ez 16:39; 23:29). The unfaithful city, deprived of its garments, was exposed to dangerous attacks and covered in shame, remaining without any defense.[18]

---

[15] See S h i l o h, "Jerusalem: The Early Periods and the First Temple Period," 706.

[16] See R e n k e m a, *Lamentations*, 256.

[17] Quoted after *The Revised Standard Version.*

[18] See R e n k e m a, *Lamentations*, 134–5.

In Lamentations 1:13, we can read that the city was destroyed by the fire sent by the Lord from heaven. The fire emphasizes the intensity of God's wrath against Jerusalem (cf. also Lam 1:12; 2:4) and is reminiscent of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Gn 18–19), the two cities destroyed by the fire falling from the sky (cf. Gn 19:24–25). Destruction by means of fire is also characteristic of the siege tactics known from ancient sources. The excavations conducted by Nahman Avigad in Jerusalem confirmed that the city had been destroyed precisely in that way.[19] As the Book of Lamentations states, the fire of divine wrath devoured the bones of the daughter of Zion. This picture shows the fire that penetrates the body and touches its entrails. The meaning of this metaphor is revealed in the light of Lamentations 4:11, where the ardent wrath of the Lord kindles the fire which devours the foundations of Zion. It would be difficult to imagine the fire destroying even the stone foundations of the city, but by claiming it had actually been the case, the editor of the book emphasizes the immense scale of destruction.

It is worth noting that the immensity of the catastrophe is underlined by the contrast between the vision of Jerusalem in ruins and that of the city prior to the siege: "full of people" (Lam 1:1), and "the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth" (Lam 2:15). After the war, those phrases were used only by the enemy to openly mock and deride Jerusalem.

DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE

The capture of the Temple is given a special place in the description the fall of Jerusalem. A direct reference to this event can be found in Lamentations 1:10 and 2:6–7. Paradoxically, the text of Lamentations 1:10 does not focus on the material aspect of destruction, but on the fact of the Babylonian troops entering the Temple. Although the invasion of the Temple was certainly accompanied by pillage and material destruction (cf. 2 Kgs 25:9; Ps 74:3), the first issue observed by the author is the transgression of the divine prohibition by the "pagans," *gôyim*.[20] The source of the prohibition is Deuteronomy 23:3–4, which mentions the Ammonites and the Moabites. In the Hebrew Bible, there are also texts that generally refer to foreigners (*ben-nēḵār*), prohibiting their participation in the liturgy or their presence in the Temple (cf. Ex12:43; Lv 22:25; Ez 44:9). The presence of a foreigner in the Temple during the liturgy, let alone his participation in it, was considered (with rare exceptions:

[19] See S h i l o h, "Jerusalem: The Early Periods and the First Temple Period," 709.

[20] See Francis B r o w n, Samuel R. D r i v e r, and Charles A. B r i g g s, entry גָּוִי, in Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 156.

cf. 1 Kgs 8:43; 1 Chr 6:32–33) as profanation (*ḥll*) of the liturgy or of the sanctuary. Now, the Babylonian invasion and the entrance of the troops to the Temple amazed the editor of the Book of Lamentations and made him question his (sometimes almost magical: cf. Jer 7:12–14) faith in God's protection of the holy place.[21] First and foremost, it was incomprehensible to him that a pagan army might have been an instrument of God's punishment, the scourge in God's hands.

In the second extract focused on the Temple (Lam 2:6–7), the motifs of profanation ('spiritual' destruction) are mixed with those of material destruction. The issue of pagan presence in the sanctuary, mentioned earlier in Lamentations 1:10, reappears. The editor of the text adds yet another element of the 'spiritual' destruction: the Lord has caused to be forgotten (*šikkaḥ*) "appointed feast and sabbath"[22] (Lam 2:6), He "has scorned (*zānaḥ*) His altar," and "disowned (*ni'ēr*) His sanctuary" (Lam 2:7). The syntax of Lam 2:6-7 places the terms *znḥ* and *n'r* in verse 7 in parallel with *ḥms* and *šḥt* in verse 6. In this sense, the desecration of the Temple becomes visible in its physical destruction.[23] The physical destruction of the Temple also highlights the problem of God's silence. On the one hand, the destruction is seen as caused by God's silence.[24] On the other hand, the destroyed Temple is the clearest sign of that silence.

It is worth considering how the precise object of the destruction has been specified. In Lamentations 2:6, the editor writes about the "tabernacle" (*śoḵ* —"hut," "enclosure"[25]), the appointed place of celebration (*môʿēd*). In 2:7, he also adds the altar (already mentioned in Lamentations 1:10), the sanctuary, the walls of the citadel [of the Temple], and finally the house of the Lord (probably alluded to already in Lamentations 2:1).[26] In this way, he brings to the reader's mind not only the particular edifice of the Temple, but also the whole complex of buildings connected with it, and points to the fact that (as in the case of the city) their fate and that of the human beings are intertwined. And it is exactly the fate of the inhabitants of Jerusalem that I shall analyze in the next section of this paper.

---

[21] See Jacob L. H e l b e r g, "The Incomparable Sorrow of Zion in the Book of Lamentations," *Ou Testamentiese Werkgemeenskap in Suid-Afrika* 15–16 (1972–1973), 33.

[22] Quoted after *The Revised Standard Version*.

[23] See R e n k e m a, *Lamentations*, 246.

[24] See F. W. D o b b s - A l l s o p p, *Lamentations* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2002), 87.

[25] See R e n k e m a, *Lamentations*, 240; cf. Pss 27:5; 42:5; 76:3. See also P r o v a n, *Lamentations*, 63.

[26] See D o b b s - A l l s o p p, *Lamentations*, 83.

THE SUFFERING OF THE PEOPLE

In my analysis of the picture of the destruction of Jerusalem, I have progressed from its outermost circles (destruction of the land) towards the central point of the city (the Temple). I shall try to follow the same pattern in my analysis of the suffering of the people. According to some exegetes, the latter actually provides the profound structure of the Book of Lamentations.[27] However, at this point the order of my analysis becomes more subjective. In my view, the outermost circle consisted of common people, represented especially by women. The next circle encompassed the elite: the nobility, the priests, the prophets, and the elders, as well as the king, while the innermost circle was that of young ones and children. Not only were they the most precious treasure of the chosen people, but they also represented its future and hope.

THE WOMEN

Women, who normally did not take active part in military operations, frequently became the first victims of war, and endured great suffering due to physical violence inflicted on them by the victors and their ruthless ferocity. Those acts of violence were recorded in the Book of Lamentations and can easily be traced.

Lamentations 5:11 mentions "women raped in Zion and virgins in the towns of Judah." Interestingly, the married women and the virgins open the list of those who suffered because of the war. The editor writes about the women being raped by the invaders. The verb *ʿnh* can mean "to be afflicted, humiliated, to bend down," but it can also be used to describe sexual violence (cf. Gn 34:2; Dt 22:24, 29; 2 Sm 13:12, 14; Ez 22:10–11). The fact that soldiers, expected to obtain their equipment and care for its maintenance during the war, and frequently also to serve without pay, considered the women as part of their loot, helps explain the meaning of Lamentations 1:10. According to some exegetes, the phrase "all her precious things" may refer to the women. After the fall of the city, the women, together with the material goods, became property of the looters (cf. Ez 24:16).[28] In addition, the fact that the women suffered from violence points to another aspect of their experience of the war: they no longer had defenders, as their husbands, brothers, and sons were probably all dead.[29]

---

[27] See Michael M. M o o r e, "Human Suffering in Lamentations," *Revue Biblique* 90(1983), 549.

[28] See R e n k e m a, *Lamentations*, 143.

[29] See Alan M i n t z, "The Rhetoric of Lamentations and the Representation of Catastrophe," *Prooftexts* 2(1982): 3.

Several other verses inform the reader about the fate of Jerusalem. In Lamentations 1:4, the young women are described with the *nip'al* form of the verb *ygh*, "to grieve."[30] This root is used nine times in the Hebrew Bible and, out of it, five times in Lamentations. In four of the five cases, the Lord is directly mentioned as the agent of the affliction of Jerusalem (cf. Lam 1:5.12; 3:32.33; cf. also Lam 1:4). Renkema believes that the young women in question were connected with the Temple (as dancers and singers).[31] To locate their grief against the historical background, yet describe it in theological terms (as sadness caused by the Lord), one might point to the cessation of worship and liturgy in the Temple or to the destruction of the Temple itself.

The fate of women is presented in Lamentations not only as tied to that of the city and the Temple, but also as related to the suffering of other social groups: Lamentations 1:4 reads that women experienced sorrow together with the priests; Lamentations 2:10 shows women united with the elders of the daughter of Zion in their gestures of mourning, while Lamentations 1:18 speaks about young women going to exile with young men (cf. 2 Kgs 25:11; Lam 1:5). Sometimes, the women felt exiled even though they had remained in the war-ravaged homeland (cf. Lam 1:1c.3c.4c.9bc.15b.18b.22ab).[32] Lamentations 2:21 records that both young and old women, just like the men (described here as boys) and the elders, were killed by sword. And finally, the women partook of the horror of hunger (mentioned throughout the book and affecting all the social groups).

We shall conclude the analysis of the suffering of women as described in the Book of Lamentations by pointing to another horrible experience: a specifically feminine one, related to motherhood. The women described in Lamentations witnessed the death of their children. They saw their children being killed by the enemy on the walls, as well as in the streets and squares of the city (Lam 1:15; 2:21; 4:1-2) and, which was much worse, watched their small children dying of hunger in their arms (cf. Lam 2:12; 4:3-4). However, the human suffering depicted in Lamentations reaches its apex when the women, forced by the circumstances of the war, sell, cook, and eat their children (cf. Lam 1:11; 2: 20; 4:10). Those scenes make the desperate cry (recorded in Lamentations 1:12) of the daughter of Zion profoundly authentic: "Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow..."

---

[30] See Francis B r o w n, Samuel R. D r i v e r, and Charles A. B r i g g s, entry עָנָה, in Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 387.

[31] See R e n k e m a, *Lamentations*, 116.

[32] See D o b b s - A l l s o p p, *Lamentations*, 76–7.

THE NOBLES, THE PROPHETS, THE PRIESTS, THE ELDERS, AND THE KING

As a group, the women may be considered as representing the fate of 'average' individuals during a siege. Proceeding to the second group, however, we must keep in mind that our analysis will address higher circles in the social hierarchy in which the king enjoyed the highest status. On the one hand, it might be expected that the position of the members of that group would guarantee them greater safety during the time of siege (e.g., special protection). On the other hand, they were those who would bear the most serious consequences of the fall the city. The latter assumption seems confirmed by the fact that the editor of the Lamentations would frequently focus his attention precisely on that group.

The word *śārîm*, "princes," is mentioned in the Lamentations four times. The noun *śār* can designate various functions and offices.[33] In the Bible, it is used to refer to princes and heads of the state, but also to heads of the army, those responsible for stopovers during the march through the desert, and superiors of the priests or the Levites (cf. 2 Chr 35:9; 36:14, 18; Jer 51:59; 52:10, 25). Whenever they are mentioned in Lamentations, it is to describe an affliction they suffered, and each time it is a different one. Lamentations 2:2 depicts them as sharing, with the entire kingdom, the experience of profanation (*ḥll*). Lamentations 1:6 mentions their hasty escape (cf. 2 Kgs 25:4–5). Held responsible for the pro-Egyptian politics and for the outbreak of the anti-Babylonian rebellion, they found themselves in danger after the victory of the Babylonian troops. Their escape and the chase after them are presented in terms of a hunt where the princes are compared to deer which, having taken a narrow escape, could not find pasture and lost their strength. When captured, some of them were killed (cf. Lam 5:12; cf. also 2 Kgs 25:19-21; Jer 39:6; 52:10, 25-27), while others were forced into exile (cf. Lam 2:9; cf. also 2 Kgs 25:21; Jer 52:27-30). Since a person's position in the social structure was inseparable from their living standard, one can recognize the predicament of the social class in question also in Lamentations 4:5[34]: those accustomed to excellent food (cf. Gn 49:20) and brought up in purple were found languishing (from hunger) in the streets and clinging to ash heaps.[35]

In Lamentations 5:12, the princes are mentioned together with the elders (*zəqēnîm*). The latter term has been used five times in the book to designate those

[33] See Francis B r o w n, Samuel R. D r i v e r, and Charles A. B r i g g s, entry שַׂר, in Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 978.

[34] See Adele B e r l i n, *Lamentations: A Commentary* (London and Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press), 2002, 505–6.

[35] See ibidem, 107.

who played an important role in the public life of the city (with the exception of Lamentations 2:21, where the term describes simply the age group). Because of the war, they were forced to abandon their duties (e.g., passing judgment at the city gates) (cf. Lam 5:14; cf. also Dt 21:19; Jo 20:4; Ru 4:1-12), they were no longer given honors and respect due to their age and social position (cf. Lam 4:16; 5:12), and had to perform the rites of mourning and penance (cf. Lam 2:10). Finally, they suffered and died from the horrors of hunger (cf. Lam 1:19).

In this context, the Book of Lamentations mentions also the Temple in the sense of the religious aristocracy represented by the priests and the prophets. The priests went into mourning because all worship had ceased in the destroyed Temple (cf. Lam 1:4). As in the case of the elders, the priests were no longer respected by the society (cf. Lam 4:16). They experienced the failure of the Law, which had been the basis of religious and social life (cf. Lam 2:9). Together with other inhabitants of the besieged city, the priests suffered hunger and died from it (cf. Lam 1:19). As they had the right to eat from the offerings made in the Temple, their case appears as particularly tragic. The prophets were no longer sent visions by the Lord, and so became useless to the society (cf. Lam 2:9). The horrible fate of the priests and the prophets is described by the editor of the second song of Lamentations: they were killed by the enemy in the Temple of the Lord (cf. Lam 2:20). Both priests and prophets were also accused of being the immediate cause of God's wrath that destroyed the city, because they "shed the blood of the righteous" (Lam 4:13) in the midst of Jerusalem, which may symbolize also idolatry.[36] In Lamentations 2:6, the editor speaks of the rejection of the priests by God and of his ardent wrath against them. Such a rejection was also experienced by the person at the top of the social hierarchy: the king.

Apart from verse 2:6, we find a mention of the king in Lamentations 4:19–20 and 2:9. Chronologically, one should first read Lamentations 4:19–20, which describe the escape attempted by the king (cf. 2 Kgs 25:3– 7; Jer 52:7–11). The events depicted in those verses took place outside the city, in the desert near Jericho, where the king was captured by the Babylonians. The tragic conclusion of those verses is that neither the city, with its walls, streets, and squares, nor the desert and the mountains could provide the king and his nobles with a place to hide.[37] Brought to Riblah, the king, after watching the death of his sons, was blinded and sent to Babylon (cf. 2 Kgs 25:6–7). An allusion to the Babylonian exile can also be found in Lamentations 2:9, which alludes to the king and his nobles being made to stay among pagan peoples. Two features of the verses in question (Lam 4:19–20 and Lam 2:9) deserve special attention. Firstly, the enemy's determination is expressed by means of an image of

[36] See ibidem, 104.

[37] See P r o v a n, *Lamentations*, 122.

eagles preying on the king (cf. 2 Sam 1:23; Jer 48:30; 49:22). The verb *dlq* used here expresses the idea of furious and ardent pursuit. Secondly, the king is presented as "the anointed of the Lord" and "the breath of our life," as well as metaphorically: by means of an image of a tree ("under his shadow we shall live among the nations"—Lam 4:20). This characteristic makes evident not only the psychological aspect of kingship (the sense of security and protection), but also—and perhaps above all—its theological aspect: the Davidic king as a sign and partner of God's covenant with His people. The king is also mentioned in Lam 2:9, in the context of the exile into which he and his princes were driven (cf. Lam 4:14.17).[38]

THE YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE CHILDREN

At the end of this section of the paper, I shall focus on the situation of the young people and the children. They are the group that played almost no active role in the military, political, or social life, but it is them—in our view—who actually turn the scales against Judah in the story reported in the Book of Lamentations. Such a claim might appear odd, particularly given the fact that the analysis of the material concerning the young people and the children has not revealed anything new or extraordinary. Their suffering might seem to have been already addressed in the descriptions of the experience of the other groups. Although the group in question was the weakest part of the society, during the war, they were shown mercy neither by the enemy nor by the neighbors. Those who, due to their weakness and lack of autonomy, relied on love, solidarity, and compassion in time of peace were made to partake of the suffering inflicted upon the whole population by the war. The Book of Lamentations describes the double threat that hunger posed to the children (cf. Lam 2:11–12). They were dying of hunger like all the others but, in addition, they were exposed to another unexpected and fatal danger. The book reports— as has been mentioned in the discussion of the fate of the women—the appalling practices of cannibalism and trade in children (cf. Lam 1:11; 2:20; 4:10).[39] The editor describes the horrible common fate of the boys and the elders (cf. Lam 2:21), and writes that the virgins and the young were killed by sword as if they were soldiers, men of war (Lam 2:21). The virgins are shown to have been subjected to the same sufferings as the mature women (cf. Lam 5:11), also partaking of the fate of the elders

[38] See B e r l i n, *Lamentations: A Commentary*, 113.

[39] See Delbert R. H i l l e r s, *Lamentations*: *A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney and Auckland: Doubleday 1992), 148. See also Delbert R. H i l l e r s, "History and Poetry in Lamentations": 157–60.

(cf. Lam 2:10). The young are destroyed or driven into exile (cf. Lam 1:18). A particular drama experienced by that group, as the fifth song of Lamentations suggests, consisted in that they had to mature too soon because there was no time for them to be young (cf. Lam 5:14) and, even after the war and the fall of Jerusalem, were forced to labor beyond their strength (cf. Lam 5:13).

Having recognized the solidarity of fate and suffering between the youngest and the oldest generations, is it possible to justify the statement that the children and the young people are given a particularly important place in the Book of Lamentations? It seems to be the case for two reasons. Firstly, the fate of the children raises the question of the suffering of the innocent, which cannot be easily explained: pointing to suffering as a penalty for sin amounts to oversimplification. The editor of the book perceives the suffering of the innocent as a fact undermining the traditional rules of retaliation and retribution. In our view, the problem in question becomes one of the main issues with which the editor strives to cope, at the same time inviting the reader to confront it mentally. Secondly, the motif of the suffering of the children and the young gives more breadth and depth to the picture of the disaster. Not only do such suffering and death show the true extent of the tragedy, but they also appear to overshadow the future of the nation, the city, and the whole country. Is it possible for Jerusalem, with part of her future already dead, to keep her hope alive? Is there a place for hope in the Book of Lamentations? We shall address this issue in the final section of the paper.

THEOLOGY AND HOPE IN THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

It is difficult to discuss the theology of Lamentations as if there were a consistent, clearly identifiable theological system presupposed in the book. The diversity of opinions among modern exegetes demonstrates that it would be virtually impossible to find such a system in the Book of Lamentations. In the third section of the paper, I shall present some theological ideas emerging from the descriptions of suffering included in the analyzed text. I shall also try to identify traces of hope hidden among the mourning and lament over the destroyed city and the suffering of its people.

"WE HAVE TRANSGRESSED AND REBELLED, AND YOU HAVE NOT FORGIVEN" (Lam 3:42)

The Book of Lamentations shares a belief, common in the ancient Near East, that catastrophes, on both social and individual levels, are consequences

of sin or transgression of the law.[40] Such a belief is expressed throughout the book (cf. Lam 1:5, 8, 14, 18, 20, 22; 2:14; 3:39, 42; 5:7, 16). On this evidence, one might hypothesize that the roots of Lamentations are to be found in the Deuteronomistic theology, in which reward and punishment were perceived as immediate consequences of human behavior. Such a clear dependence seemed obvious to the editors of Deuteronomy, even though it might not be apparent what sin or transgression had caused the punishment.[41] Some biblical scholars claim that "the very admission of personal guilt becomes the turning point towards hope in the future."[42] However, even if the traces of this traditional concept can be found in Lamentations, it seems that we can also see in it a clear break from the well-established theological view. It is interesting to observe that in Lamentations sin is attributed to different subjects, such as Zion, Jerusalem, "the daughters of my people," or the ancestors. All of them seem rather abstract: perhaps not unreal, but certainly not specific. This impression is strengthened by Lamentations 3:39, where the editor mentions "a man,"[43] or "a living man,"[44] as the subject of sin, as if the sin (and the punishment for it) could be attributed to any living being. Although the book contains also confessions made in the first person ("we have transgressed and rebelled"—Lam 3:42; "we have sinned"[45]—Lam 5:16), the individual songs express a certain tension, suggesting that, seen in the context of the disaster the Lamentations describes, the traditional view of Deuteronomistic theology was not without flaw.[46]

This hypothesis also appears to be supported by the fact that, in the Book of Lamentations, it is difficult to find any specific characterization of the sin which had caused the disaster. The reader is provided only with general information on the issue: Lamentations 1:18 declares that Jerusalem rebelled against the words of the Lord, while Lamentations 4:13 mentions the sin of the priests. Apart from the allusions included in these verses, the nature of transgression to which the text refers finds no explanation; such details are absent even from the verses where the fault is confessed in the first person ("we have sinned"),

---

[40] See D o b b s - A l l s o p p, *Lamentations*, 29.

[41] See Jannie H u n t e r, *Faces of a Lamenting City: The Development and Coherence of the Book of Lamentations* (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, New York, Paris and Wien: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996), 73.

[42] Jože K r a š o v e c, "The Source of Hope in the Book of Lamentations," *Vetus Testamentum* 42, no. 2 (1992): 227.

[43] Quoted after *The Revised Standard Version.*

[44] Quoted after *The Revised Standard Version.*

[45] Quoted after *The Revised Standard Version.*

[46] See Kathleen M. O' C o n n o r, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 121.

or from Lamentations 4:6, which suggests that the sin of the "daughter of my people"[47] was greater than that of Sodom.

The reader's uncertainty about the reasons which might explain the catastrophe is, perhaps, a reflection of the doubt cherished by the editors of the Book of Lamentations. On the one hand, they remembered the religious tradition expressed, e.g., in Deuteronomy 28[48] or in the teaching of the prophets who announced inevitable punishment of sin. On the other hand, the editors of Lamentations remembered also the theology of Zion, expressed, e.g., in the Psalms (Pss 46, 48, 87), which affirmed the inviolability of the Temple as the place chosen by the Lord. It is probably with that uncertainty that the evolution in the attitude of the editors began, their fearful doubt, gradually changing into detached observation of the facts, and finally into the open accusation: 'The Lord has exceeded ... The Lord has abandoned himself to anger....'

"THE LORD HAS DESTROYED WITHOUT MERCY" (Lam 2:2)

In the preceding section, we mentioned the change of heart experienced by the editors of Lamentations. They struggled with doubts and questions—and they struggled intensely. They faced a disaster never seen before. Their traditional theology was prompting them that the destruction they witnessed had been caused by sin, so they recognized that the Lord had punished them rightly.[49] But when they considered the scale of the tragedy, the effects of the Lord's wrath, they were unable to suffer in silence any more. And so, at the beginning of three out the of five songs the book comprises (cf. Lam 1, 2, and 4), we can hear a cry rising to God from the ruins of the Holy City: it is a voice resembling an inarticulate sound, *'êḵāh*, a cry of pain, suffering, or despair, a cry of grief for the death of the city, for the death of the husband, wife, or children, for the 'death' of the Temple, and for the death of the human heart. But that initially inarticulate cry, coming from the wounded hearts of the witnesses to the tragic events, immediately changes into eloquent images of the fall, of the suffering of the people, and of the emotions it had engendered. As shown in the previous section of the paper, the image of destruction which has emerged from Lamentations 1–2 is expressive of the destructive force, violence, and cruelty unparalleled anywhere in the Hebrew Bible. The picture provided by the editors of Lamentations leaves no doubt about the fact that the

[47] Quoted after *The Revised Standard Version.*

[48] See H u n t e r, *Faces of a Lamenting City*, 77.

[49] See M i n t z, "The Rhetoric of Lamentations and the Representation of Catastrophe": 11.

agent of destruction was the Lord himself, while the emotions of profound sadness, excruciating pain, anger, and burning rage, as well as despair, have been portrayed with an incomparable richness of color. And one must admit that the vivid description of the destruction renders the expression of the extreme emotions both comprehensible and justified. The God who allowed children to die must take into account the outcry of human beings!

"AND THEREFORE I HAVE HOPE" (Lam 3:21)
"DO NOT FEAR!" (Lam 3:57)[50]

It would be a mistake to think that the Book of Lamentations is focused merely on the past historical events and on the resulting tragic situation of Judah. The mental world of the editors of the book cannot be exhausted by mere memory of the disaster, not even by their lament over the hardships caused by the destruction. Lamentations also speaks about the future. This fact inspires the first ray of hope, which seemed to have died together with the children of Jerusalem: "I say, 'Gone is my glory, and all that I had hoped for from the Lord'" (Lam 3:18). As a matter of fact, the vocabulary of hope, absent from every other chapter of the book, appears in surprising abundance in Lamentations 3 (cf. Lam 3:18.21.24.26.29).[51] Derived from the realization, 'We have survived,' hope takes here a concrete form and immediately engenders the questions: 'What then will be? Have you utterly rejected us? Are you angry with us beyond measure?' (cf. Lam 5:22). Those questions testify to the fact that the human beings who have suffered begin to search for God; they do it by following the well-known path: "Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord" (Lam 3:40; cf. Jer 18:11; 35:15; 14:3). However, the protagonists of Lamentations do not share the optimism of the past generation. Rather, they know that despite their great desire to return to the Lord, they are unable to do so by their own efforts, but desperately need the Lord's help. "Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old" (Lam 5:21). In this way, by awaiting God's help, the survivors take their first step: they decide to hope. It is not an easy hope, but a hope in tears; a hope expressed as an act of volition rather than as a conviction that 'all will be well.' In Lamentations, the human beings *decide* to hope: 'I will have hope' /

[50] See Bo J o h n s o n, "Form and Message in Lamentations," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 97 (1985): 60.

[51] See Miriam J. B i e r, *'Perhaps There is Hope'*: *Reading Lamentations as a Polyphony of Pain, Penitence, and Protest* (London, Oxford, New York, New Delhi and Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2016), 113.

'I will persevere, persist' (*'ôḥîl*—cf. Lam 3:21).[52] It seems that the destruction, the suffering, and the pain have become, paradoxically, evidence of God's faithful and unfailing love.[53] And although that love assumes the painful shape of judgment, it also leads to the discovery that "the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end" (Lam 3:22). Thus the hope declared in Lamentations 3:21, and expressed again in Lamentations 3:24, is not naive hope, nourished only by the memory of the miraculous exit from Egypt or glorious conquest of the Promised Land.[54] In the presence of God stands the new human being: changed by pain and formed out of the suffering of the earth (cf. Gn 2:7), courageous enough to raise not only his or her cry, but also his or her fists toward the sky. The destroyed city and the murdered people provide a silent background to that dramatic protest. And now, against this background, the human being makes his or her decision: 'I will have hope, I will persevere' (cf. Lam 3:21), and immediately adds in a whisper: 'Please, O Lord, do not let me down....'

To such a decision, God responds by entering into dialogue with the human being transformed by suffering. The same God who raised the cry of his anger, now speaks through silence,[55] broken by just two Hebrew words which resound in Lamentations 3:57, *'al-tîrā'*—"Do not fear!"[56]

*

At the beginning of this analysis of the Book of Lamentations, it seemed important to concentrate on the historicity of the described events, so as to seek their confirmation in other books of the Hebrew Bible, or in other historical sources.[57] I have always been convinced that there is more to the story

[52] See Ulrich B e r g e s, *Klagelieder* (Freiburg, Basel and Wien: Herder, 2002), 197. Sometimes this "man's hopeful transition" is identified as starting only in Lamentations 3:22. See Mark P. S t o n e, "Vindicating Yahweh: A Close Reading of Lamentations 3.21-42," "Journal for the Study of the Old Testament" 43, no. 1 (2018): 90–1. Stone reads the Hebrew verb *yḥl* in Lamentations 3:21 in its basic meaning of 'to wait.'

[53] See Paul R. H o u s e, "Lamentations," in *Song of Songs. Lamentations*, ed. Duane Garrett and Paul R. House (Dallas, TX: Thomas Nelson Inc., 2004), 415.

[54] See Paul W. F e r r i s Jr., *The Genre of Communal Lament in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992), 145.

[55] See M i n t z, "The Rhetoric of Lamentations and the Representation of Catastrophe": 16.

[56] See Shaye J. D. C o h e n, "The Destruction: From Scripture to Midrash," *Prooftexts* 2, no. 1 (1982): 20.

[57] See H i l l e r s, "History and Poetry": 155–61; Daniel L. S m i t h - C h r i s t o p h e r, "Reassessing the Historical and Sociological Impact of the Babylonian Exile (597/587–539 BCE)," in *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions*, ed. James M. Scott (Leiden, New York and Köln: Brill, 1997), 7–36; Hans M. B a r s t a d, *The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the*

told in Lamentations than the poetic imagination of the authors and editors of the book. While 'walking' with them through the squares and streets of the destroyed city and 'meeting' the suffering people, I have discovered that the power of Lamentations does not consist in a more or less faithful account of the dramatic events in the history of Israel. Rather, I realized that the power of the book lies in that it is an expression of the universal experience of human suffering.[58] As such, Lamentations is addressed not only to its human listeners, or readers, but also to God and—I am certain of it—contains vestiges of the divine response.

Still, suffering and its expression, though overwhelming, does not exhaust the contents of the Book of Lamentations and its careful reading unveils the theological themes apparently unique to the Hebrew Bible, such as human guilt and responsibility, the role of God in the destruction of the land, the city, and the Temple, as well as in the terrible suffering experienced by the inhabitants of the desolate—'murdered'—city. Against such a background the issue of hope emerges as particularly telling and significant. The hope which can be found in Lamentations sprouts up from among the ruins and debris and is rooted in the conviction that "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end" (Lam 3:22); however, it is also a hope born in the hearts of those who, having suffered, decided to give God a chance, to trust him one more time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barstad, Hans M. "After the 'Myth of the Empty Land'. Major Challenges in the Study of Neo-Babylonian Judah." In *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*. Edited by Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003.

———. *The Myth of the Empty Land. A Study in the History and Archeology of Judah During the 'Exilic' Period*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996.

History and Archeology of Judah During the 'Exilic' Period (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996); Bustenay O d e d, "Where Is the 'Myth of the Empty Land' To Be Found? History versus Myth," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 55–74; Hans M. B a r s t a d, "After the 'Myth of the Empty Land: Major Challenges in the Study of Neo-Babylonian Judah," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, 3–20; Charles E. C a r t e r, "Ideology and Archeology in the Neo-Babylonian Period: Excavating Text and Tell," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, 301– 22; J. Maxwell M i l l e r and John H. H a y e s, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986).

[58] See Iain W. P r o v a n, "Reading Texts Against an Historical Background: The Case of Lamentations 1," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 4, no. 1 (1990): 141.

Baumann, Arnulf. "אבל." In *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*. Vol. 1. Edited by Gerhard J. Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973.

Berges, Ulrich. *Klagelieder*. Freiburg, Basel and Wien: Herder, 2002.

Berlin, Adele. *Lamentations: A Commentary*. Louisville, KY, and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

Bier, Miriam J. *'Perhaps There is Hope': Reading Lamentations as a Polyphony of Pain, Penitence, and Protest*. London, Oxford, New York, New Delhi and Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2016.

Brown, Francis, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix containing the Biblical Aramaic. Coded with the Numbering System from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003.

Carter, Charles E. "Ideology and Archeology in the Neo-Babylonian Period: Excavating Text and Tell." In *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*. Edited by Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003.

Cohen, Shaye J. D. "The Destruction: From Scripture to Midrash." *Prooftexts* 2, no. 1 (1982): 18–39.

Dobbs-Allsopp, F. W. *Lamentations*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2002.

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

Helberg, Jacob L. "The Incomparable Sorrow of Zion in the Book of Lamentations." *Ou Testamentiese Werkgemeenskap in Suid-Afrika* 15–16 (1972–1973): 27–36.

Hillers, Delbert R. "History and Poetry in Lamentations." *Currents in Theology and Missions* 10 (1983): 155–61.

———. *Lamentations*: *A New Translations with Introduction and Commentary*. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney and Auckland: Doubleday, 1992.

House, Paul R. "Lamentations." In *Song of Songs. Lamentations*. Edited by Duane Garrett and Paul R. House. Dallas, TX: Thomas Nelson Inc., 2004.

Hunter, Jannie. *Faces of a Lamenting City: The Development and Coherence of the Book of Lamentations*. Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, New York, Paris and Wien: Peter Lang Publishing 1996.

Johnson, Bo. "Form and Message in Lamentations." *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 97 (1985): 58–73.

Krašovec, Jože. "The Source of Hope in the Book of Lamentations." *Vetus Testamentum* 42, no. 2 (1992): 223–33.

Miller, J. Maxwell, and John H. Hayes. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986.

Mintz, Alan. "The Rhetoric of Lamentations and the Representation of Catastrophe." *Prooftexts* 2, no. 1 (1982): 1–17.

Moore, Michael M. "Human Suffering in Lamentations." *Revue Biblique* 90 (1983): 534–55.

O'Connor, Kathleen M. *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.

Oded, Bustenay. "Judah and the Exile." In *Israelite and Judean History*. Edited by John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986.

———. "Where Is the 'Myth of the Empty Land' To Be Found? History versus Myth." In *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*. Edited by Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003.

Pritchard, James B., ed. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.

Provan, Iain W. *Lamentations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991.

———. "Reading Texts Against an Historical Background: The Case of Lamentations 1." *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 4, no. 1 (1990): 130–43.

Renkema, Johan. *Lamentations*. Leuven: Peeters, 1998.

Shiloh, Yigal. "Jerusalem: The Early Periods and the first Temple Period." In *The New Encyclopedia of Archeological Excavations in the Holy Land*. Vol. 2. Edited by Ephraim Stern. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Carta, 1993.

Smith-Christopher, Daniel L. "Reassessing the Historical and Sociological Impact of the Babylonian Exile (597/587-539 BCE)." In *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions*. Edited by James M. Scott. Leiden, New York and Köln: Brill, 1997.

Stone, Mark P. "Vindicating Yahweh: A Close Reading of Lamentations 3.21-42." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 43, no. 1 (2018): 83–108.

ABSTRACT / ABSTRAKT

Krzysztof NAPORA, "There May Yet Be Hope..." (Lam 3:29): Destruction, Suffering, and Hope in The Book of Lamentations

DOI 10.12887/32-2019-4-128-03

In this article, the author analyzes the images of the destruction of the Kingdom of Judah and the suffering of its inhabitants during the Babylonian invasions of the 6th century BCE as they have been described by the editors of the Book of Lamentations. The author discusses the successive stages of the destruction (land—city—Temple) and of the suffering (ordinary people—nobles—children). In the concluding section, some theological reflections inspired by the book are presented. Among them, a prominent place belongs to the issue of hope that sprouts up in the ruins of the desolated city.

Keywords: Book of Lamentations, hope, Babylonian captivity, Jerusalem

Contact: Katedra Egzegezy Ksiąg Historycznych, Prorockich i Sapiencjalnych, Instytut Nauk Teologicznych, Wydział Teologii, Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski Jana Pawła II, Al. Racławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin, Poland
E-mail: naporus@gmail.com
https://pracownik.kul.pl/krzysztof.napora/o_mnie

Krzysztof NAPORA, „A może jest jeszcze nadzieja...” (Lam 3:29). Zniszczenie, cierpienie i nadzieja w Księdze Lamentacji

DOI 10.12887/32-2019-4-128-03

Wśród ksiąg Starego Testamentu, ukryta nieco w cieniu Proroctwa Jeremiasza, Księga Lamentacji jawi się jako utwór zupełnie wyjątkowy. W żadnej innej spośród ksiąg biblijnych obraz zniszczenia kraju i miasta oraz portret ludzkiego cierpienia nie splatają się ze sobą w sposób bardziej sugestywny. Ruiny i ból tworzą przejmujący pejzaż odmalowany kunsztownym rytmem hebrajskiej poezji żałobnej (*qinah*) i wyśpiewany głosami pięciu pieśni tworzących księgę. Wyjątkowość księgi nie polega jednak wyłącznie na plastycznym opisie cierpienia i zniszczeń. Opis ten staje się tłem, na którym redaktor Lamentacji szkicuje niezwykły traktat, próbując na nowo stawiać tradycyjne pytania dotyczące Boga, człowieka, sensu cierpienia i źródeł nadziei. Autor niniejszego opracowania analizuje kolejno obrazy zniszczenia i cierpienia ludzi dotkniętych dramatem wojny zawarte w wybranych fragmentach Księgi Lamentacji oraz stara się zidentyfikować elementy teologicznej refleksji redaktora księgi. W kontekście opisanego dramatu jednym z najważniejszych motywów tej refleksji wydaje się motyw nadziei.

Słowa kluczowe: Księga Lamentacji, nadzieja, Niewola Babilońska, Jerozolima

Kontakt: Katedra Egzegezy Ksiąg Historycznych, Prorockich i Sapiencjalnych, Instytut Nauk Teologicznych, Wydział Teologii, Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski Jana Pawła II, Al. Racławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin
E-mail: naporus@gmail.com
https://pracownik.kul.pl/krzysztof.napora/o_mnie