

Susannah M. Larry

The Daughter's Resistance

Lamentations and Theodicy



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LAMENTATIONS AND THEODICY

Susannah M. Larry



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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AJSR</i>	<i>Association for Jewish Studies Review</i>
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
<i>ANET</i>	James B. Pritchard (ed.), <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 3rd edn, 1969)
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
HBT	Horizons in Biblical Theology
<i>JANES</i>	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>RevBib</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

INTRODUCTION

1. Orienting Questions

As a young Divinity student at Vanderbilt University, I read Lamentations for the first time while enrolled in an Introduction to the Hebrew Bible class taught by Dr Douglas A. Knight. The presence of a female speaker as a central figure in the first two chapters of Lamentations floored me. Daughter Zion did not match what I had come to expect of ‘women in the Bible’; she speaks and challenges divine authority. How could such an extraordinary book—and such an extraordinary persona—have escaped my notice?

I think there is more in play than my own prior lack of biblical knowledge. Daughter Zion has been erased from Lamentations because of choices across millennia. Only in rare instances does her voice survive. In effect, the ‘Lamentations’ which readers like myself encounter today scarcely can be said to contain a dominant, authoritative female figure. Traditions of readings have shaped and reshaped Lamentations, generally bending its trajectory away from focus on the women’s voices within it. As, increasingly, audiences have chosen to read Daughter Zion out of Lamentations, her theological contributions to the Hebrew text of Lamentations are lost. When she appears in received tradition, she rarely is the bold figure whom I encountered, but a defeated woman whose licentiousness has stripped her of dignity and clout.

What happened to Daughter Zion’s voice? Through what processes did it both develop and disappear, and what do both its evolution and erasure have to tell us about how communities might read Lamentations? When Daughter Zion’s voice is absent, what is missing, and when present, what does it add to our understanding?

2. Scope

The biblical texts at the core of my project are the first two chapters of Lamentations—a short section of an already short book. In these chapters, the personification of Daughter Zion speaks, while in later ones, she

goes silent. While I regard Lamentations as a composite of five linked poems, my primary concern is with Daughter Zion's subjectivity, and so I have limited the scope of my project. I am interested in how the interpretive history of Lamentations treats Daughter Zion within these chapters, specifically her complex views of sin and suffering. In both Christian and Jewish traditions, Daughter Zion's minimization corresponds with an increasing inability to see the complex relationship between sin and suffering in the book. Therefore, in considering these materials in particular, I hope to show what consequences the erasure of Zion has had within communities of faith. Concerning my other criterion for inclusion, the occasions in which Daughter Zion's personification speaks directly are so rare that including them is a matter of both interest and obligation.

Finally, I have surveyed the period from the time of Lamentations' composition (including a look at its Mesopotamian forebears, whose influence I will later argue and Hebrew prophetic predecessors) to the present. Though this time period is very broad, and meant omission of certain receptions, my concerns range from the historical-critical (for example, the role of Mesopotamian sources and eighth-century prophets in Lamentations' writing), to the pastoral, involving contemporary communities of faith. Thus, I found a broad time period necessary to address the wide-ranging, and yet interconnected, concerns of my study.

3. *Lamentations' Context*

While the dating and genre of Lamentations are not crucial elements of my argument in and of themselves, addressing these issues provides the groundwork for later topics. Most authors have dated Lamentations to the early to mid-sixth century BCE, shortly following the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, with significant disagreements by Kaiser (1981), and Provan (1991).¹ Overall, the tone of the book is bleak, a feature exemplified by the communal complaint that God has utterly forsaken Jerusalem (5.20). While the destruction of Jerusalem is obviously apparent, no reference to Persian ascension or return from exile is present.

However, these factors do not inherently establish a pre-exilic dating. As F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp writes, 'It is one thing to make general inferences about the setting of the plotted action in a fictional work or of the

1. Iain W. Provan, *Lamentations*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991); Otto Kaiser, 'Klagelieder', in *Das Hohelied, Klagelieder, Das Buch Ester* (ed. Hans-Peter Müller and Otto Kaiser; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), pp. 93-200.

lyrical discourse in a poem, and quite another to use these inferences as the basic datum for establishing a time of composition'. Accordingly, Dobbs-Allsopp conducts a linguistic analysis of Lamentations. He concludes that, while there are features of Lamentations characteristic of late Biblical Hebrew, postdating the pre-exilic literature of the bible, the co-occurrence of standard Biblical Hebrew forms alongside these late Biblical Hebrew ones indicates that late biblical Hebrew has not yet fully developed.² He writes, 'Furthermore, the typological misfit between Lamentations and both the classic SBH and classic LBH strongly suggests that the language of Lamentations reflects a transitional stage between the two dominant phases of BH'.³ Given similarities with Ezekiel, Dobbs-Allsopp dates Lamentations to the sixth century, after 587/6, pre-dating works that have been linguistically analyzed as belonging to the end of the sixth or beginning of the fifth century. Thus, Dobbs-Allsopp joins the majority of scholars dating Lamentations to the period relatively close to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, a position which I share.⁴

Classifying the genre of Lamentations has long presented problems for scholars. The book, consisting as it does of five poems with different speakers and theological attitudes, does not necessarily need to be regarded as a unity. In the first three chapters, first person singular speakers ('I') predominate, but in the fourth and fifth chapters, the speaker shifts to the communal 'we'. The presence of these differing pronouns raises questions about whether we should consider Lamentations a prayer or petition or a dirge, recognizing the generally held subgenres of lament. The suggestions of these different subgenres within Lamentations renders it resistant to easy categorization.⁵

2. F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, 'Linguistic Evidence for the Date of Lamentations', *JANES* 26 (1998), pp. 1-36 (21).

3. Dobbs-Allsopp, 'Linguistic Evidence', p. 35.

4. Dobbs-Allsopp, 'Linguistic Evidence', p. 36.

5. See, for example, Hedwig Jahnow's classification of Lamentations in the folk genre of the dirge, or *qināh*. *Das hebräische Leichenlied im Rahmen der Völkerdichtung* (Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1923), pp. 170-71. However, some modifications that Westermann argues would actually qualify them as communal laments. Claus Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation* (trans. Charles Muenchow; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), p. 7; Paul Wayne Ferris, Jr expands greatly on this concept in *The Genre of Communal Lament in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (SBLDS, 127; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992).

4. Translation of בַּת־צִיּוֹן

a. Biblical Origins of בַּת־צִיּוֹן

The figure of בַּת־צִיּוֹן ('Daughter Zion') is by no means alone in the Hebrew Bible as a woman personifying a city. Among the sixty-nine occurrences of the formula בַּת GN (geographical name) in the Hebrew Bible, seventy-four percent (50 or more) 'occur as designations of the personified country or city that belong to genre of city-laments'.⁶ Additionally, female figures designated in this way make frequent appearances within prophetic texts, outside of the lament genre altogether. Specifically, בַּת־צִיּוֹן appears a total of twenty-six times, though most frequently in Lamentations (8× in Lamentations, 7× in Isaiah, 4× in Micah, 3× in Jeremiah, 2× in Zechariah, as well as 1× in Psalms). W.F. Stinespring's seminal article 'No Daughter of Zion: A Study of the Appositional Genitive in Hebrew Grammar' normalized the translation of בַּת־צִיּוֹן as 'Daughter Zion', arguing that the construct relationship should not be understood primarily as a familial one. For Stinespring, not only can בַּת serve as a term of endearment rather than filial attachment, but the construct relationship can be construed as an instance of appositional genitive, in which one term in the construct chain explains the other.⁷ Thus, Daughter Zion is only a personification of the city itself, not its people.

Mark E. Biddle's comparative approach to the personification of women in Northwest Semitic and Mesopotamian literary contexts responds both to arguments that trace the personification to the Hosean polemic against Canaanite fertility goddesses and to feminist critiques of the dehumanizing effects of the personification upon women. Biddle provides a panoramic account of the history of the personification.⁸ Biddle notes that the Mesopotamian and West Semitic identification of cities with goddesses gives the biblical personification positive origin; the portrayal of cities as patronesses, mothers, and maidens are usually complimentary.⁹

6. F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, 'The Syntagma of *bat* Followed by a Geographical Name in the Hebrew Bible: A Reconsideration of Its Meaning and Grammar', *CBQ* 57 (1995), pp. 451-70 (454).

7. W.F. Stinespring, 'No Daughter of Zion: A Study of the Appositional Genitive in Hebrew Grammar', *Encounter* 26.2 (1965), pp. 133-41 (135).

8. Mark E. Biddle, 'The Figure of Lady Jerusalem: Identification, Deification, and Personification of Cities in the Ancient Near East', in *Scripture in Context IV* (ed. K. Lawson Younger, Jr, William Hallo, and Bernard F. Batto; ANETS, 11; Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), p. 173.

9. Biddle, 'The Figure of Lady Jerusalem', p. 186.

Taking a different approach to critiquing Stinespring, Dobbs-Allsopp argues that the construct formula appearing in בַּת-צִיּוֹן is best understood as a divine title parallel to the Akkadian construct *mārtu* ('daughter of')¹⁰ Thus, for some scholars, including Dobbs-Allsopp, the personification of cities as women evolved in order to provide an Israelite 'substitute for the dominant image' of goddesses equated with a captive city.¹¹ Like Dobbs-Allsopp, Michael H. Floyd also disagrees with Stinespring's diagnosis of the appositional genitive, but points to the primarily familial connotation of בַּת. To Floyd, the familial translation of 'Daughter' is the most straightforward explanation of the formula בַּת GN. He suggests that this formula should be regarded simply as the singular form as בָּנוֹת GN, such as appears in the Song of Songs, used to refer to the female inhabitants of the city.¹² From this perspective, Daughter Zion in Lamentations is an individual representative of the ordinary women of Jerusalem, taking part of the traditional (gendered) women's role of voicing lament.

Responding to Floyd, Dearman brings up new points related to Zion's nomenclature while still maintaining Springstine's appositional genitive. Dearman counters Dobbs-Allsopp's position on Lamentations' connection to Mesopotamian city-lament, because the five extant Sumerian texts do not make use of the בַּת GN formula. He emphasizes that the 'daughter' label can indicate a role within YHWH's household, as YHWH, though neither identified as a father or spouse of Daughter Zion, treats the figure punitively as if she were a member of his family.¹³

Both Floyd and Dearman bring up points that, aside from their stance on the issue of the appositional genitive, do not have to be mutually exclusive. Like Floyd, I believe the cultural precedent of women's role of voicing lament is too important to be ignored, and I appreciate his insistence on the connection of the בַּת-צִיּוֹן figure to flesh-and-blood women. However, Floyd ironically undersells the extent to which the speaking voice in Lamentations 1–2 figures primarily in a *maternal* role, rather than as the child of a mother. From Dearman, I take the point that Daughter Zion operates as a family member, with references to the marriage metaphor in the background. Whether functioning as a

10. Dobbs-Allsopp, 'The Syntagma of *bat*', p. 467.

11. Dobbs-Allsopp, 'The Syntagma of *bat*', p. 455.

12. Michael H. Floyd, 'Welcome Back, Daughter of Zion', *CBQ* 70 (2008), pp. 484-504 (489-90).

13. J. Andrew Dearman, 'Daughter Zion and her Place in God's Household', *HBT* 31 (2009), pp. 144-59 (156-57).

wife, daughter, or mother in a particular part of Lamentations, she is a woman vulnerable to more powerful males, namely, her father/husband, YHWH. YHWH is at liberty to control her body and punish her as he sees fit.

However, I disagree with Dearman that the absence of the *בַּת* GN formula from city lament disallows the comparison of Lamentations and Mesopotamian lament. The writers of Lamentations have creatively drawn upon a variety of sources rather than copying and pasting from a solitary one. The traditional gendered role of women in lament, the Mesopotamian goddesses of city-laments, and the household relationships suggested in the Hebrew Bible can all factor into the emergence of *בַּת-צִיּוֹן* in Lamentations. In this project, I will translate *בַּת-צִיּוֹן* as Daughter Zion, while maintaining the polyvalent nature of *bat* here (with connections both to real inhabitants of Jerusalem and goddess figures).¹⁴ Ultimately, while the philological concerns do factor into the understanding of Daughter Zion and are a means of ‘doing right’ to the people and texts studied, they are not wholly determinative of meaning.¹⁵

5. Lamentations 1–2 Within the Biblical Canon

Lamentations is both related to and distinct from other parts of the Hebrew Bible canon. While I will discuss these relationships at greater length later in this book, surveying some of these connections on the outset helps to establish my view of Lamentations. Lamentations is especially frequently read in light of prophetic books, so here, I want to highlight two particularly important relationships.

a. Invoking the Marriage Metaphor

Sexual and marriage metaphors are frequently present within the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible. Using this trope, capital cities and sometimes countries are the female spouses of YHWH, and then, following

14. Here, I share Dobbs-Allsopp’s perspective that it is not necessary ‘to stipulate goddesses as the sole or even primary source of the personification in question’. There can be multiple sources of the personification of the city-women in question, ranging from the Mesopotamian goddesses to the cross-cultural phenomenon of women’s lament. These goddess figures, alongside biblical personifications, shape Daughter Zion’s portrayal in Lamentations (F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, ‘Daughter Zion’, in *Thus Says the Lord: Essays on the Former and Latter Prophets in Honor of Robert R. Wilson* [ed. John J. Ahn and Stephen L. Cook; New York: T&T Clark, 2009], pp. 125-34 [130 n. 16]).

15. Dobbs-Allsopp, ‘Daughter Zion’, p. 127 n. 7.

their disloyalty, experience some combination of divorce, abandonment, and sexual, physical, and verbal abuse. At times, the prophetic literature also contains the description of the restoration of the marriage between YHWH and the constituent city or country.¹⁶

It is not necessary to regard Lamentations' echoes of the marriage metaphor, or, as O'Connor terms it, the 'broken household metaphor',¹⁷ as a conscious use on the part of Lamentations' poets. Mandolfo argues that, regardless of authorial intent, the central role of the marriage metaphor in biblical depictions of women renders it a source for Lamentations' appropriation:

The prophetic marriage metaphor is one instantiation of Israel's master narrative that says women are 'naturally' inferior to men and must defer to them in all matters social and moral. Because it taps into a vein that goes deep into Israel's understanding of itself, the marriage metaphor is part of an extremely effective rhetorical strategy deployed by the prophets... God does not 'author' responsibly. He 'tells stories' about her that entirely disregard her point of view.¹⁸

However, there are major differences in the terminology of Jerusalem's transgressions in Lamentations and those in other prophetic books. Daughter Zion is not explicitly accused of 'whoring' or adultery. Her marriage and betrothal do not figure within the text. Neither are idols of any kind mentioned. Instead, as Baumann points out, the weight of the text falls upon the absence of a comforter for Zion, as in Nah. 3.7.¹⁹ Thus, the less overtly accusatory tone is a major divergence between Lamentations and prophetic texts personifying cities as women, which accompanies other differences, such as the absence of divine voice. Lamentations develops a perspective towards Daughter Zion that is morally nuanced, even while it builds on the trope of the marriage metaphor.

16. See, for example, Hos. 1–2, Jer. 2–3, Ezek. 16 and 23.

17. Kathleen O'Connor, "'Speak Tenderly to Jerusalem": Second Isaiah's Reception and Use of Daughter Zion', *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 20.3 (1999), pp. 281–94 (282).

18. Carleen R. Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2007), p. 16.

19. Gerlinde Baumann, *Love and Violence: Marriage as a Metaphor for the Relationship Between YHWH and Israel in the Prophetic Books* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), p. 71.

b. *Lamentations and Jeremiah*

Despite Lamentations' appropriations of other instances of Hebrew Bible city-women, there is a more particular relationship with Jeremiah. The figure of Rachel in Jer. 31.15-16 who 'refuses to be comforted' represents the 'mourning woman' tropes which Daughter Zion shares. The poets of Lamentations have seized upon two aspects of Rachel in Jeremiah: her role as a mother and her refusal to be comforted—in order to shape בַּת-צִיּוֹן in Lamentations, who envelopes and expands upon Rachel's role.

Even more prominent than Zion's status as a widow within Lamentations 1–2 is her maternal identity. While city-women of the Hebrew Bible can serve a maternal role as well (e.g. Israel in Hosea), maternity is usually secondary to their status as adulterous wives. In contrast, the brief portrayals of Daughter Zion as an adulterous wife or widow in the first verses of Lamentations appear secondary to her maternal role. Zion's maternal instincts may hail from her affiliation with Rachel, whose entire identity within Jer. 31.15-16 is maternal.

Additionally, Rachel's introduction of the motif of the 'comfort' bears a close literary relationship with the refrain of Lamentations 1. Rachel's refusal of comfort appears to stem from her maternal role specifically. In fact, Lamentations' insistence that there is 'no comforter' for בַּת-צִיּוֹן intensifies Rachel's 'refusal' to be comforted; Zion does not even have the opportunity to eschew comfort, for comfort is impossible. While the crafting of Daughter Zion in Lamentations draws from Rachel in Jeremiah, Rachel remains relatively more visible in Christian and Jewish traditions, and Daughter Zion recedes into the background. Rachel 're-emerges from' and becomes a 'cipher' of Zion.²⁰

6. *Foregrounding בַּת-צִיּוֹן*

Recent scholarship on Lamentations, with which I will engage in detail later in this book, centers the personification of Daughter Zion. Carleen Mandolfo's *Daughter Zion Talk Back to the Prophets* engages both feminist and postcolonial criticism, along with Bakhtinian literary theory, to demonstrate how the voice of Daughter Zion in Lamentations both draws from and resists the precedent of portrayals of city-women elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.²¹ *Daughter Zion: Her Portrait, Her*

20. Tod Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 128.

21. Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion*.

Response,²² edited by Mark Boda, Carol J. Dempsey, and LeAnn Snow Flesher, includes an extensive collection of essays on Daughter Zion, both in Lamentations specifically and throughout the Hebrew Bible. Within this collection, prominent themes that emerge are the roles Daughter Zion plays in various prophetic texts, Daughter Zion as a speaking subject in dialogue with God and others, the cultural significance of lament, and the violence and trauma which she suffers.

With the entrance of trauma theory into biblical studies, contemporary works have shown how Lamentations enacts literary ‘survival’. In *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book*, Tod Linafelt traces how Daughter Zion manages to survive and protect her children in Lamentations, despite the bias against her within religious traditions. James W.S. Yansen’s *Daughter Zion’s Trauma: A Trauma-Informed Reading of Lamentations* argues for a reading of Daughter Zion in Lamentations that draws on both psychological and literary understandings of trauma survivors.

7. Naming My Investments

I do not pretend to be an objective interpreter of the bible. Given my theoretical frameworks, I believe that *no one* is an objective interpreter, and each of us bears the responsibility of identifying our own subjectivities. Through this identification of my investments, I aim to clarify the interpretive decisions I make and create a space of intellectual honesty.

I am an upper-middle class white, straight, cis-woman from the southern United States. Through each of these identifiers, I recognize that I bring to bear a level of privilege. Spiritually, I identify as an Anabaptist, meaning that I take seriously—but critically—the authority of Scripture and believe that the Gospel of message of Jesus Christ is good news for the whole world. My critiques of ‘Christian traditions’ stem from the mainline Protestant and evangelical traditions that have formed me, which have had the tendency to silence women’s voices. The urgency of my task to reclaim scriptural women’s voices for the Church also emanates from this background.

I also identify as a survivor of domestic violence and sexual assault. This component of my lived experience means that I do not have the privilege of reading texts such as Lamentations which depict women’s abuse as ethically neutral. I am keen to uncover the gendered power

22. Mark J. Boda, Carol J. Dempsey, and LeAnn Snow Flesher (eds.), *Daughter Zion: Her Portrait, her Response* (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2012).

dynamics inherent in biblical texts, and I believe my background gives me the heightened awareness of these texts that is necessary to do this work. Believing, as I do, that scripture is authoritative and can become a life-giving Word for oppressed communities, I am eager to parse out how new interpretations can overcome systemic injustices such as sexism.

8. *Chapter Outline and Argument*

I have arranged my chapters in hopes of giving a biography of Daughter Zion. A good biography, I believe, should include not only an account of someone's life, but also an explanation of where they come from, and what happened after their passing. However, a substantial introduction to my intellectual framework will be in order. In Chapter 1, I discuss how I understand both reception history and feminist criticism, filtered through a trauma studies lens, leading to an understanding of a biblical theodicy in Lamentations. In Chapter 2, I move on to the origin stories of Daughter Zion in Lamentations, both in ancient Mesopotamian city-laments and in Hebrew prophets. Chapter 3 constitutes my close reading of Lamentations 1–2, centered especially on parsing out the voices of different speakers in the chapters and how the express theodical opinions, particularly, that of Daughter Zion herself. Chapters IV deals exclusively with Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah's intertextual relationship with Lamentations' questions of theodicy, while chapter V moves on to the rest of the biblical canon, as well as ancient translations of Lamentations. In Chapters 6 and 7, I consider how Daughter Zion's afterlives fared in Jewish and Christian traditions, in parallel trajectories that, though with different features and theological rationales, both trend toward Daughter Zion's erasure. Finally, in my conclusion, I explore the implications of my findings for church ministry and project directions for future research.

Lamentations' challenge to the retributive theodicy of sin causing suffering comes through the voice of Daughter Zion. Her persona maintains the outrageous position that one *can* have sinned, and yet, lack of innocence does not mean that one deserves the outcome received. From the perspective of trauma studies, this counterclaim to Deuteronomic theology renders Lamentations a deeply hopeful resource. In the process of re-constructing meaning from the ashes of trauma, the bodies, minds, and spirits of trauma survivors, like Daughter Zion herself, need not be the casualty. Entities beyond the self entrap one in a web of suffering, and God bears witness to the ongoing conversation of meaning-making, even when God is the object of blame.

Daughter Zion's theodicy therefore represents a step in the process of traumatic healing beyond the need for simple answers that restore perceived safety through internalized self blame. The path forward here is uncharted. Daughter Zion is able to process her experiences of pain and loss without ascribing self-blame as their explanation. She is able to open herself to a world where there are no easy answers, and yet, both her dignity as a trauma survivor and her ongoing, protesting conversation with God remain intact.