

## *Assigning the Book of Lamentations a Place in the Canon*

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*Lamentations is one of a number of books that is found in more than one position in the different canons of Scripture. These canons are a product of different reading communities, each with their own interpretation of the biblical books. The present study is based on the premise that where a biblical book is placed relative to other books reflects an evaluation of the book by ancient readers, with the ordering of books viewed as a paratextual phenomenon. With regard to Lamentations, two different positions (each with its own rationale) are found in the Hebrew and Greek canons. The alternate placements of the book of Lamentations reveal that the compilers of these canons viewed its theological and historical meanings in different ways. These two different contexts are intended to shape the reader's perception of what the book is about. Consciously or unconsciously, the contemporary reader is influenced by the positioning of a biblical book. Thus, canonical placement is not value-neutral and needs to be critically evaluated.*

KEYWORDS: *Lamentations, paratext, canon, Jeremiah, reception history*

### INTRODUCTION

There has been a shift in recent discussion of the meaning of the book of Lamentations, with increasing recognition that canonical positioning is of possible hermeneutical significance.<sup>1</sup> This development is in accord with the current scholarly interest in canonical issues and with the rise of

1. E.g., Robin A. Parry, *Lamentations* (Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 18: “The placing of Lamentations within the biblical canon was not unreflective and was intended to guide Jewish readers in their interpretation of the text”; idem, “Prolegomena to Christian Theological Interpretation of Lamentations,” in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Craig Bartholomew and

the study of paratext in particular.<sup>2</sup> The term “paratext” (coined by Gérard Genette) refers to elements that are adjoined to the text but are not part of the text, if “text” is given a minimal definition and strictly confined to the words.<sup>3</sup> The paratext of Scripture encompasses features such as the order of the biblical books, the names assigned to the different books, and the schemes of textual division within the books.<sup>4</sup> Since these elements are appended to the text, they provide a frame of reference for the text and reflect an interpretation of the text. They are, in effect, aids for readers. Genette uses the metaphor of the “threshold” (*seuil*) of a building, paratext providing a way of entering a text.<sup>5</sup> Though they can be conceptually differentiated, this study assumes that text and paratext are integrally related and that their interrelationship provides evidence of how different communities of readers understood the biblical books and how they wished the books to be interpreted.

In this discussion I will focus on one paratextual feature, namely the order of the placement of the biblical books, using the book of Lamentations as a test case. I argue that various ancient readers understood Lamentations differently. I seek to show that their construal and use of the text is (in part) preserved in the varied canonical orders. To that end, first, I examine the positioning of Lamentations in the Hebrew canon, one that reflects the liturgical use of Lamentations as one of the *Megillot*. My conclusion is that this placement does not tie the book to any one ancient historical event and affirms its ongoing role in

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Anthony Thiselton; *Scripture and Hermeneutics* 7; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 393–415, here 399 n. 18.

2. For a brief history of the latter, see August den Hollander, Ulrich Schmid, and Willem Smelik, eds., *Paratext and Megatext as Channels of Jewish and Christian Traditions: The Textual Markers of Contextualization* (Jewish and Christian Perspectives 6; Leiden: Brill, 2006), vii, xiii. For the application of the concept to narrative, see H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (2nd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 30, 31. Abbott (30) notes: “we can easily overlook the contributions of paratexts.”

3. Gérard Genette, “Introduction to the Paratext,” *New Literary History* 22 (1991): 261.

4. On the last feature, see Marjo C. A. Korpel and Josef M. Oesch, eds., *Delimitation Criticism: A New Tool in Biblical Scholarship* (Pericope: Scripture as Written and Read in Antiquity 1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2000).

5. Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Literature, Culture, Theory Series 20; trans. Jane E. Lewin; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1, 2: “More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a *threshold*.” It “constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that . . . is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it” (italics original; suspension points mine).

the religious life of God's people. The relation of Lamentations to neighbouring Hebrew books (chiefly the other books of the *Megillot*) is also explored. The overall effect of this canonical collocation is to affirm the muted hope expressed in Lamentations that God will respond favourably to the pleas of his suffering people. Next, I show that placement of Lamentations in the Greek Bible makes the Jeremiah connection fundamental to a proper reading of the book. This leads to a rapprochement between the prophet of judgment and the people who suffer at the hands of God. In the Greek Bible, Lamentations is read within the prophetic tradition and its canonical conversation partners are prophetic books. Neither placement of Lamentations needs to be viewed as having priority over the other. Lastly, turning from reception history to the issue of the influence of biblical book order on contemporary readers, I explore how reading Lamentations in its different canonical settings potentially changes a reader's understanding of the book. I ask and try to answer the questions: Is it necessary that we decide whether one is a better or worse canonical placement? If not, how does scrutinising these different canonical placements assist contemporary interpreters?

Paratextual elements give access to the early reception history (*Rezeptionsgeschichte*) of the books that make up the Bible.<sup>6</sup> Looking at the biblical paratext as an example of reception connects this approach to the burgeoning field of reception criticism. Part of the history of the use and interpretation of the biblical text that would otherwise be hidden from view is preserved in its paratextual features. The position of a book reflects the post-authorial valuations of ancient readers, though what exactly the perceived relation between adjoining books may be can often only be discovered by reading and comparing the books themselves. This is what I will attempt, though the results must be tentative, seeing that those responsible for the biblical canonical orders did not record their reasons for placing particular books in the positions they did.

With regard to Lamentations, one frequent suggestion for the *Sitz im Leben* is that the poems come from ceremonies of mourning in the fifth month (Ab) in the years following the fall of Jerusalem such as those mentioned in Zech 7:3, 5; 8:19 (cf. Jer 41:4–9).<sup>7</sup> Whatever the

6. For the multifarious aspects of the reception of Lamentations, see Paul M. Joyce and Diana Lipton, *Lamentations through the Centuries* (Wiley-Blackwell Bible Commentaries; Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013). The issue of canonical placement is not, however, addressed.

7. E.g. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Klagelieder (Threni)* (BKAT 20; Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Neukirchener Verlag, 1960), 12, 13; Paul Wayne Ferris, Jr., *The Genre of Communal Lament in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (SBLDS 127; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 107.

merits of this theory of origins, it is a speculative interpretive context to the extent that the book itself makes no statement about its provenance, whereas the positioning of Lamentations relative to other biblical books is a definite contextual datum and, therefore, is a factor that is and should be taken into account in the reading process. Lamentations is one of a number of Old Testament books that is found in more than one canonical position, other notable examples being Ruth and Daniel. Lamentations is placed either among five festal scrolls or it follows the prophecy of Jeremiah. Such alternatives reflect the different uses and interpretations of this work within the Hebrew and Greek canonical traditions.

#### ITS PLACE IN THE HEBREW CANON

In the Hebrew Bible, Lamentations is placed in the third division of the canon (Writings) under a section called the Five Scrolls (*Megillot*), this being a late (post-Talmudic) canonical grouping. The order of these five books in Codex Leningradensis (B19<sup>A</sup>) (the basis of *BHK*<sup>3</sup>, *BHS*, *BHQ*) and in Sephardic codices appears to be based on the principle of chronology: Ruth, Song of Songs (written by a young Solomon?), Ecclesiastes (by Solomon when he was old?), Lamentations, and Esther.<sup>8</sup> These five books are grouped together for liturgical reasons, for public reading at the five main festivals. In some Hebrew Bibles (especially those used by Ashkenazic Jews) the order reflects the sequence of the major Jewish festivals in the calendar (assuming the year starts with the month Nisan): Song of Songs (Passover), Ruth (Weeks), Lamentations (Ninth of Ab), Ecclesiastes (Booths), and Esther (Purim).<sup>9</sup> The liturgical rationale of the *Megillot* grouping is confirmed by the fact that it is placed directly after the Pentateuch in the Italian editions of the Hebrew Bible in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries,<sup>10</sup> for the Pentateuch and the

8. There is, however, some minor variability in the codices; see the tables provided by Michèle Dukan, *La Bible hébraïque: Les codices copiés en Orient et dans la zone séfarade avant 1280* (Bibliologia 22; Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2006), 67; Julius Steinberg, *Die Ketuvim: ihr Aufbau und ihre Botschaft* (BBB 152; Hamburg: Philo, 2006), 133, 152; Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 452–64; Peter Brandt, *Endgestalten des Kanons: Das Arrangement der Schriften Israels in der jüdischen und christlichen Bibel* (BBB 131; Berlin: Philo, 2001), 151–71.

9. L. B. Wolfenson, “Implications of the Place of the Book of Ruth in Editions, Manuscripts, and Canon of the Old Testament,” *HUCA* 1 (1924): 157.

10. For details, see C. D. Ginsburg, *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible* (1897; repr. New York: Ktav, 1966), 3, 4; Wolfenson, “The Place of the Book of Ruth,” 155 n. 13.

*Megillot* are the only portions read in their entirety in the lectionary of the synagogue.

An earlier tradition preserved in the Babylonian Talmud tractate *Baba Bathra* (14b) reads: “Our rabbis taught that the order of the prophets is Joshua and Judges, Samuel and Kings, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Isaiah and the Twelve . . . The order of the Writings is Ruth and the Book of Psalms and Job and Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and Lamentations (וְקִינֹת), Daniel and the Scroll of Esther, Ezra[-Nehemiah] and Chronicles” (my translation).<sup>11</sup> It is a *baraita* originating in the Tannaic period (pre-A.D. 200). Louis Jacobs argues that “order” (סדר) in this Talmudic passage means the chronological order in which the compilers of the various books of the Writings lived, with the Men of the Great Synagogue responsible for Daniel, Esther, Ezra[-Nehemiah], and Chronicles.<sup>12</sup> The position of Lamentations is toward the end of the list and immediately precedes Daniel and Esther.<sup>13</sup> This order predates the arrangement of the five festal scrolls in the *Megillot*, but still Lamentations follows hard on the heels of Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. Also noticeable is the coupling of “Song of Songs *and* Lamentations” (the conjunction is not always represented in English translations),<sup>14</sup> forming a small generic grouping of two poetic anthologies: the one romantic and the other mournful. This implies that the connection of Lamentations is fundamentally with the (mostly) poetic books that precede it rather than with the (predominantly) narrative books that follow (Daniel and the Scroll of Esther, Ezra[-Nehemiah]).<sup>15</sup>

Lamentations is read on the annual festal commemoration of the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and A.D. 70, so that in Jewish liturgy it is

11. For the text, see *Baba Bathra* (Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud; ed. I. Epstein; London: Soncino, 1976).

12. Louis Jacobs, *Structure and Form in the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 34.

13. Delbert R. Hillers, *Lamentations* (AB 7A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), xvii.

14. The grouping of books in pairs is something of a feature in *Baba Bathra*. See Beckwith, *Old Testament Canon*, 156, 157.

15. Pace Steinberg, *Die Ketuvim*, 144–51. Steinberg places Lamentations with the books that follow in what he calls a four-book “national-historische Reihe” that (he suggests) reflects the situation of the Diaspora (145). I find his schema unconvincing, namely two parallel four-book series that each (he claims) shows a movement from sorrow to joy: Job-Proverbs-Ecclesiastes-Song of Songs matched by Lamentations-Daniel-Esther-Ezra(-Nehemiah). Certainly, the book of Ezra-Nehemiah is anything but joyful, with its final picture of the people’s failure to carry through their pledge to reform their behaviour (Neh 13). See Greg Goswell, “The Handling of Time in the Book of Ezra-Nehemiah,” *TrinJ* 31 (2010): 200–03.

associated with the ninth day of Ab (the fifth month [= July/August]), the anniversary of these tragedies (Josephus, *J.W.*, 6.250, 268).<sup>16</sup> Though presumably written as a reaction to the earlier capture (cf. 2 Kgs 25:8; Jer 52:12),<sup>17</sup> clues to dating and historical specifics are difficult to discern in Lamentations itself. Iain W. Provan may go too far when he argues that we have no clear idea as to the historical period to which the text relates, but it is true that Lamentations makes no reference to the Babylonians or Nebuchadnezzar and only speaks in general terms of the “enemy/enemies” (e.g., 1:10, 16; 2:7, 16; 3:46).<sup>18</sup> That Lamentations gives little away as to the precise crisis to which it is the response means that the book is not wedded to any one historical event, with the result that Lamentations lends itself to liturgical use (and rabbinic reapplication).<sup>19</sup>

A liturgical reading of the text further loosens its connection to an ancient event, and Lamentations is remarkably non-specific in regard to identifiable historical references (as is psalmic language generally).<sup>20</sup> As with communal laments like Pss 74 and 79,<sup>21</sup> wherein those who sacked the temple are not identified, the lack of specificity and the stereotypical imagery within Lamentations fits it for reuse in new contexts (in the aftermath of the A.D. 70 destruction and post-Holocaust).<sup>22</sup> In line with this, according to Brevard S. Childs, “The suffering of one representative man [in Lam 3] is described in the language of worship which transcends any one fixed moment in

16. Simon P. De Vries, *Jüdische Riten und Symbole* (rev. ed.; Wiesbaden: Marixverlag, 2005), 141–45.

17. Jill Middlemas, *The Troubles of Templeless Judah* (OTM; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 177–84; Mark J. Boda, “The Priceless Gain of Penitence: From Communal Lament to Penitential Prayer in the ‘Exilic’ Liturgy of Israel,” in *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts* (ed. Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo; SBLSymS 43; Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 86.

18. Iain W. Provan, “Reading Texts against an Historical Background: The Case of Lamentations 1,” *SJOT* 1 (1990): 130–43; idem, *Lamentations* (NCB; London: Marshall Pickering, 1991), 11–15.

19. On the latter, see Shaye J. D. Cohen, “The Destruction: From Scripture to Midrash,” *Proof* 2 (1982): 19–22.

20. See Paul M. Joyce, “Sitting Loose to History: Reading the Book of Lamentations without Primary Reference to its Original Historical Setting,” in *In Search of True Wisdom: Essays in Old Testament Interpretation in Honour of Ronald E. Clements* (ed. Edward Ball; JSOTSup 300; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 246–62.

21. Ferris, *The Genre of Communal Lament*, 89–152 with a table on p. 93.

22. Provan, “Reading Texts,” 142, 143.

history.”<sup>23</sup> Certainly, its liturgical use (as one of the *Megillot*) is a recognition and affirmation of its ongoing role in the religious life of God’s people.

### *Lamentations and its Hebrew Neighbours*

Readers routinely view enjambment as a clue that significant relations are to be discerned between a particular book and its canonical neighbours, and this reading habit forms the basis of the analysis that follows. The assumption is that a book is more closely related to books next to it or nearby, and less closely related to books placed far from it. In terms of the relation of Lamentations to neighbouring books in the Hebrew canon, notably the other books of the *Megillot*, Lamentations alludes to destroyed Jerusalem’s widow status (1:1: “How like a widow has she become”; cf. 5:3) and forms a parallel to Naomi’s situation as featured in the book of Ruth (e.g., 1:1, 5, 20–21). The books of Ruth and Lamentations, each in their own way wrestle with the problem of theodicy,<sup>24</sup> given their recognition of God’s involvement in distressing situations and the decimation of a family on the one hand and of the city of Jerusalem on the other (Ruth 1:20, 21; Lam 2:1–8). The books of the *Megillot* have in common that God seldom speaks or directly acts, and women play a key role in nearly all of them (the exception in regard to the latter being Ecclesiastes [N.B. 7:28]).<sup>25</sup> The book named “Ruth” has as its central character Naomi, whose crisis it is (the loss of her husband and sons) (1:3–5), but its main character is ever-active Ruth, who appears in every scene in the book except one,<sup>26</sup> and she is a divine agent in the restoration of the fortunes of the family. God’s direct involvement is stated by the narrator of Ruth only once (4:13), though God is repeatedly referred to by characters within the story, so that one of its themes is the (largely) hidden nature of God’s providence (1:6, 9, 16–17, 20–21; 2:12, 20; 3:10, 13; 4:11, 12, 14).<sup>27</sup> A theological reading of the

23. Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM, 1979), 595.

24. Noted by Marjo C. A. Korpel, *The Structure of the Book of Ruth* (Pericope: Scripture as Written and Read in Antiquity 2; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2001), 230–31.

25. Lee, *The Singers of Lamentations*, 130.

26. Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Bible and Literature 9; Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 83–110.

27. See Ronald M. Hals, *The Theology of the Book of Ruth* (Facet Books Biblical Series 23; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969).

book would interpret the rescue of Naomi's family within the wider story of God's purposes for Israel (given the genealogy leading to David in 4:18–22), with the implication that divine kindness will uphold the dynasty of David for the benefit of Israel as a whole,<sup>28</sup> so that the book of Ruth (like Lamentations) has the fate and future of the nation as a whole in its purview. By contrast, there is no happy ending to Lamentations; however, its placement near or next to Ruth implies that the hopeful sentiments in Lam 3 are not to be viewed as a passing mood or momentary venture of faith.

Ecclesiastes (following it or preceding it) shares the sombre mood of Lamentations and generalises its negative experience of the vicissitudes of life. Jennie Barbour discerns various links between Qohelet's poem about old age and death (12:1–7) and the Israelite tradition of the city lament that found normative expression in Lamentations (e.g., desolate and silent streets [Eccl 12:4, 6; cf. Lam 1:1; 5:18]; the contrast of past/present conditions using gold/silver [Eccl 12:6; cf. Lam 4:1]; imagery of death and darkness [Eccl 12:2; cf. Lam 3:2, 6]; the impact on different social classes [Eccl 12:3; Lam 1:18; 5:11–14]).<sup>29</sup> In both books, however, the depressing tone is relieved at various points (e.g. Eccl 2:24; 3:13, 22; 5:18 [Heb. 17]).<sup>30</sup> If we keep in mind the ending of Ecclesiastes (12:13, 14), it is not as unorthodox as sometimes suggested, and Stephen de Jong argues that “the theology of Qohelet is to be located within the mainstream of the Old Testament.”<sup>31</sup> Likewise, the strophes at the centre of Lamentations (3:22–24, 25–27, 31–33) reflect the credal declaration of God's character given in Exod 34:6–7 (his kindness, faithfulness and mercy),<sup>32</sup> and they are not to be discounted just because the book also contains protest against what God has done to Zion (e.g., 2:20: “Whom have you ever treated like this?”). God is acknowledged as the cause of his people's suffering (e.g., Lam 1:12–15; 2:1–8), but a divine response of mercy is hoped for but not taken for

28. Gregory R. Goswell, “The Book of Ruth and the House of David,” *EQ* 86 (2014): 116–29.

29. Jennie Barbour, *The Story of Israel in the Book of Qohelet: Ecclesiastes as Cultural Memory* (OTM; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 138–56.

30. R. Norman Whybray, “Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy,” *JSOT* 23 (1982): 87–98; Augustinus Gianto, “The Theme of Enjoyment in Qoheleth,” *Bib* 73 (1982): 528–32.

31. Stephen de Jong, “God in the Book of Qohelet: A Reappraisal of Qoheleth's Place in Old Testament Theology,” *VT* 47 (1997): 154–67.

32. Heinrich Gross (*Klagelieder* [Die Neue Echter Bibel; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1986], 28) calls Lam 3:22–23 “den Höhepunkt des Liedes” and cites similar sentiments found in Pss 86:13; 103:8; 145:8.



granted in the final dialectical verses of the book (5:20–22). What we can say, therefore, is that Lamentations and Ecclesiastes resist readings that (in the name of piety) would attempt to explain away the contradictions of the human experience of suffering. On the other hand, they are not totally pessimistic about life's prospects. In both books, simplistic answers are avoided, but hope is not extinguished.

In Song of Songs, the woman is the first speaker (1:2–7) and the main speaker in the song,<sup>33</sup> but it is probable that God is mentioned at only one point in this collection of songs about romantic love.<sup>34</sup> In Lamentations, one of the two main speakers in the early chapters is “the Daughter of Zion” (בת ציון) (see below),<sup>35</sup> and her speeches are full of passion and pathos. The use of Song of Songs at Passover suggests that the song is viewed as an expression of God's love for Israel as seen in the exodus deliverance (*Song of Songs Rabbah*).<sup>36</sup> There is a long history of this interpretation in Judaism,<sup>37</sup> though to read Song of Songs as a full-blown allegory is now viewed as untenable. The love lyrics of Song of Songs can, however, be understood as picking up the reconciliation scenes between God and Israel, his estranged wife, imagined in Isaiah and Hosea, books that precede it in the ordering of the Hebrew canon (cf. Isa 54:6–8; Hos 2:14–15 [Heb. 2:16–17]).<sup>38</sup> In the more immediate setting provided for Song of Songs, this resonates with the book of Ruth

33. See the statistics provided by Athalya Brenner, “Women Poets and Authors,” in *The Feminine Companion to the Song of Songs* (ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 88.

34. This assumes that Song 8:6 uses *Yah* in reference to God (YHWH) and שלהבתה is to be translated “the flame of *Yah*”; see the discussion provided by J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 253–54 and David R. Blumenthal, “Where God Is not: The Book of Esther and Song of Songs,” *Judaism* 44 (1995): 81–82.

35. On that epithet, see Michael H. Floyd, “Welcome Back, Daughter of Zion!,” *CBQ* 70 (2008): 484–504; idem, “The Daughter of Zion Goes Fishing in Heaven,” in *Daughter Zion, Her Portrait, Her Response* (ed. Mark J. Boda, Carol J. Dempsey, and LeAnn Snow Flesher; SBLAIL 13; Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 177–200. Magnar Kartveit argues convincingly that the phrase “Daughter Zion” is not as such a personification of “Zion,” but strictly refers to the city and its population. See Magnar Kartveit, *Rejoice, Dear Zion: Hebrew Construct Phrases with “Daughter” and “Virgin” as Nomen Regens* (BZAW 447; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), ch. 5.

36. Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 2.

37. Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 28–32.

38. The suggestion is that of Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 335.

(preceding or following it), wherein the marriage of Ruth and Boaz produces a child who signals the restoration of Naomi's family (Ruth 4:17) and is a portent of God's kindness to Israel (via the dynasty of David). The structure of the poems of Song of Songs is disputed, but a number of scholars find a repeated pattern in the main units of the song (the bringing of the separated lovers together), though they do not agree on the exact dimensions of the units and use different terms to label the pattern: seeking and finding (Cheryl Exum), desire and union (David A. Dorsey) and rendezvous (Elie Assis).<sup>39</sup> In line with this, in Lamentations there is the plea that the strained relationship between God and Zion be restored (e.g., 2:18–20; 3:55–57; 5:1, 19–22). The placement of Lamentations near or next to Song of Songs can be taken as implying that ultimately a reconciliation will take place between God and “the Daughter of Zion.”

In the case of the book of Esther, the heroine Esther's initiative is highlighted (e.g., 4:16), so that the book entitled “Esther” is aptly named. The failure to refer to God in the book of Esther must be intentional and serves a function in the narrative, namely to foreground human initiative and courage.<sup>40</sup> By contrast, God is mentioned in Lamentations, though he is not recorded as speaking or making any response to the pleas directed at him. The book of Esther describes and celebrates the deliverance of the Jews from their enemies (8:15–17; 9:17–22). When the tragic expressions found in Lamentations are followed by a reading of the neighbouring book of Esther, this could be taken as implying that the city and nation will survive the crisis described in Lamentations. The overall effect, therefore, of reading Lamentations as one of the *Megillot* is to affirm the intimations of hope found in Lam 3 (esp. vv. 22–33).

#### ITS PLACE IN THE GREEK CANON

The book of Lamentations is traditionally assigned to Jeremiah, and the Septuagintal placement directly after the prophecy of Jeremiah (Codex

39. J. Cheryl Exum, “A Literary and Structural Analysis of the Song of Songs,” *ZAW* 85 (1973): 47–79; David A. Dorsey, “Literary Structuring in the Song of Songs,” *JSOT* 46 (1990): 81–96; Elie Assis, *Flashes of Fire: A Literary Analysis of the Song of Songs* (LHBOTS 503; New York: T & T Clark, 2009).

40. In a canonical story of deliverance, we expect God to be there, and, as noted by Fox, “[s]uch a violation of expectations is surely no accident.” Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 235; see also Greg Goswell, “Keeping God out of the Book of Esther,” *EQ* 82 (2010): 99–110.

Sinaiticus) is an *authorship* statement.<sup>41</sup> This positioning of the book is followed by the Vulgate and subsequently English versions. This makes the book of Lamentations a personal reaction by Jeremiah to the fall of Jerusalem (the account of which immediately precedes in Jer 52), though the suffering community is also given a voice in the communal lament found in Lam 5. Consistent with its position in the Greek canon, the book is named “Laments [of Jeremiah]” (θρήνοι),<sup>42</sup> and the Vulgate, under the influence of the Greek title, calls it *Liber Threnorum* abbreviated to *Threni* (“Laments”), with the interpretation, “The lamentations of Jeremiah the prophet” (*Threni, id est lamentationes Jeremiae Prophetae*).<sup>43</sup>

The book is appropriate to the image of the suffering prophet as depicted in the book of Jeremiah, though, of course, the Hebrew text of Lamentations makes no mention of Jeremiah. He was an acknowledged composer of laments (“Jeremiah uttered a lament [ויקונו] for Josiah”), and this and laments by others over Josiah are said to be preserved in a (lost) book entitled “The Laments” (הקינות) (2 Chr 35:25; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 10.5.1). This reference may well be the reason for assigning the Hebrew name “Laments” (קינות) to the book we are discussing (*b. B. Bat* 14b; *y. Šabb.* 16.15.c; *b. Hag.* 8b). The opening of the Targum reads: “Jeremiah the prophet and high priest said . . .” According to the Targum, an allusion to Josiah under the designation “YHWH’s anointed” is to be found in 4:20 (cf. an earlier mention of the death of Josiah in Tg. Lam. at 1:18).<sup>44</sup> As well, chronology would favour the time of Jeremiah, for Lamentations gives the appearance of a reaction by a participant in the events surrounding the capture of Jerusalem, though it is the nature of

41. In codices Vaticanus and Alexandrinus, the order is: Jeremiah, Baruch, Lamentations, and Epistle of Jeremiah.

42. The word does not reappear after the opening in the Greek form of the book. In Vaticanus and Alexandrinus ἱερεμοῖς (“of Jeremiah”) is added as a subscript. This amounts to an abbreviation of the superscription present in the Greek version of Lamentations: “And it came to pass after Israel was taken captive and Jerusalem laid waste, Jeremiah sat weeping and lamented this lament [ἐθρήνησεν τὸν θρήνον τοῦτον] over Jerusalem and said . . .”; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 10.5.1, Origen (*apud* Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.25), and *Seder Olam Rabbah* 24. The Talmud also states: “Jeremiah wrote the book of his name, Kings and Lamentations” (*b. B. Bat.* 15a).

43. Jerome, in his listing of canonical books in *Prologus Galeatus*, has: “Jeremiah with Cinoth, that is his Lamentations” (*Jeremias cum Cinoth, id est Lamentationibus suis*) and in the title to his Latin translation has: “They begin Dirges, that is, Lamentations of Jeremiah the prophet” (*Incipiunt Cinoth, id est, Lamentationes Jeremiae Prophetae*); see Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, 28, cols. 593–604, 985–86.

44. Philip S. Alexander, *The Targum of Lamentations* (ArBib 17B; Collegeville: Liturgical, 2008), 173, 122.

poetry to depict a scene with vividness and feeling. A verse like 3:14 (“I have become the laughingstock of all peoples”) sounds like the experience of Jeremiah (cf. Jer 20:7), and there is the general similarity of the suffering of “the man” (הגבר) in chapter 3 to the experience of Jeremiah (especially as reflected in Jeremiah’s “Confessions”).<sup>45</sup> There are associations between Lam 3 and the prophetic lament in Jer 14:1–10, 17–22.<sup>46</sup> The positing of the Jeremiah connection may be one factor among several (male bias? later Christological application? its central location in the book?) that has sometimes resulted in scholars placing undue stress on the male figure of chapter 3 and making the credal expressions of faith and hope in that chapter too determinative in an overall reading of the book,<sup>47</sup> for Lamentations is a book without obvious thematic resolution.

Jeremiah was a prophet adept at mourning (Jer 9:1 [Heb. 8:23]: “O that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!”) (cf. 8:18–22; 14:1–9; 15:5–9). Verses like Lam 3:53–56 can be read as recalling incidents in the troubled ministry of Jeremiah, notably his being thrown into a pit (בור) (cf. Jer 38:6–13), but other parallels unrelated to Jeremiah that are common metaphors for suffering and oppression (the pit, engulfing waters) are easily found (cf. Pss 42:7 [Heb. 8]; 69:1–2, 14–15 [Heb. 3–4, 15–16]; 88:6–7 [Heb. 7–8]).<sup>48</sup> The point, however, is that possible links with the experience of the prophet are given priority due to the placement of the book after Jeremiah. This is where paratext, reflecting the mode of reading of earlier generations, exerts an influence (beneficial or baneful) on the contemporary reading of the text, with the canonical positioning of a book suggesting (but not compelling) a certain line of interpretation, namely Lamentations is read as giving further expression to Jeremiah’s own view of the fate of Jerusalem.

45. Hannes Bezzel, “‘Man of Constant Sorrow’—Rereading Jeremiah in Lamentations 3,” in *Jeremiah (Dis)placed: New Directions in Writing/Reading Jeremiah* (ed. A. R. Pete Diamond and Louis Stulman; LHBOTS 529; New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 253–65.

46. Boda, “The Priceless Gain of Penitence, 92, 93; idem, “From Complaint to Contrition: Peering through the Liturgical Window,” *ZAW* 113 (2001): 186–97.

47. So argues Tod Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1–18. He seeks to redress the imbalance, by focussing on the portrait of Daughter Zion in Lam 1–2, but note the remarks of Parry (*Lamentations*, 167, 168, 172, 173).

48. References provided by Hetty Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations* (TOTC 21; Nottingham: IVP, 2013), 362.

*Reading Jeremiah and Lamentations Together*

The question of authorship is of little relevance if it is just a matter of historical interest and does not help us to unlock the meaning of the book and guide our reading of the book. The placement of the book in the Greek canon suggests that Lamentations, like the prophecy of Jeremiah, helps the reader to a right understanding of the catastrophe that befell Jerusalem and may be read as a vindication of the teaching of that much-maligned prophet who predicted the city's downfall. In this regard, Lamentations performs a similar function to Jer 52 (which also does not mention Jeremiah). Certainly, the Hebrew form of the book is strictly anonymous, and there is no irrefutable evidence on which to either affirm or deny authorship by Jeremiah. As for internal evidence purporting a possible connection between Lamentations and Jeremiah's teaching, the following are representative examples of similarities that have been detected: a negative view of priests and prophets (Lam 2:14; 4:13; cf. Jer 2:8; 5:31; 23:11); the expression "terror(s) on every side" (Lam 2:22; cf. Jer 6:25; 20:3, 10); the motif of bitterness (Lam 3:15, 19; cf. Jer 9:14 [Heb. 15]; 23:15); repeated descriptions of weeping and tears (Lam 2:11; 3:48–51; cf. Jer 9:1, 18; 13:17; 14:17); and the nation's misplaced dependence on nations that could not save (Lam 4:17; cf. Jer 2:36).<sup>49</sup>

Juxtaposing the prophecy of Jeremiah and Lamentations in the Greek canon reflects a reading strategy. Robin Parry sees this impinging on several areas of interpretation:<sup>50</sup> (1) the mention of the sin of the people of Jerusalem and their leadership in Lamentations is comparatively brief, but this is underlined after the fulsome exposure of the sin of the people and leaders in Jeremiah (e.g., chs. 22–23, 27–28); (2) it accentuates the covenant context of Jerusalem's failures and long history of God's patience with his people before judging them (e.g., Jer 25:1–11); (3) despite the revelation of God's wrath, it is clear that God loves Judah and that God himself is affected by her afflictions (e.g., Jer 4:19–21; 8:18–9:2; 14:17–18); (4) Jeremiah's oracles of hope (e.g., chs. 30–33) predispose readers to take the hopeful hints in Lamentations itself more seriously than they may otherwise do. In each case, Parry thinks in terms of the impact of the preceding prophetic book on the interpretation of Lamentations, but he says nothing of a retrospective reading of Jeremiah

49. E.g., S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (9th ed.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1913), 461, 462; William S. Morrow, *Protest against God: The Eclipse of a Biblical Tradition* (HBM 4; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), 110, 111 (noting that Lamentations displays "the critical prophetic viewpoint" [p.110]); Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 320, 321.

50. Parry, *Lamentations*, 161, 162.

as a result of what is, in effect, a canonical addendum to the prophecy of Jeremiah.

In this regard, some recent scholarly approaches view Jeremiah as the implied author of Lamentations, who is a fictive persona, not strictly an historical individual,<sup>51</sup> or, following Nancy C. Lee,<sup>52</sup> Jeremiah may be identified as one of the two primary poetic “voices” who are in dialogue in this polyphonic book, wherein neither perspective is privileged over the other.<sup>53</sup> On this understanding, the prophet has “a rhetorical role” in Lamentations,<sup>54</sup> and, therefore, says Lee, the book may be viewed as a canonical “extension” of the book of Jeremiah.<sup>55</sup> The other identified speaker is the personified city, using the appellative “Daughter Zion,” who is also heard in the book of Jeremiah (e.g., Jer 4:19–21).<sup>56</sup> For example, Lee assigns the verses of Lam 1 to the two poetic singers as follows: the first poetic singer (= Jeremiah) in verses 1–9b, 10–11a, 15c, 17, with the second poetic singer (= “Jerusalem’s poet”) in verses 9c, 11b–15b, 16, 18–22.<sup>57</sup> It is plain, even from a cursory look at the distribution of the verses that neither voice is allowed to predominate or drown out the other, so that multiple viewpoints are allowed to stand.<sup>58</sup>

51. Adele Berlin, *Lamentations: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 32.

52. Nancy C. Lee, *The Singers of Lamentations: Cities under Siege, from Ur to Jerusalem to Sarajevo* (Biblical Interpretation Series 60; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 42.

53. Cf. Charles William Miller, “Reading Voices: Personification, Dialogism, and the Reader of Lamentations 1,” *BibInt* 9 (2001): 393–408.

54. Lee, *The Singers of Lamentations*, 129 (italics original).

55. *Ibid.*, 130.

56. *Ibid.*, 56–63; Marjo C. A. Korpel, “Who Is Speaking in Jeremiah 4:19–22? The Contribution of Unit Delimitation to an Old Problem,” *VT* 59 (2009): 88–98.

57. Lee, *The Singers of Lamentations*, 77. Cf. William F. Lanahan, “The Speaking Voice in the Book of Lamentations,” *JBL* 93 (1974): 41–49. Lanahan distinguishes five personae. According to Lanahan, the voice of the veteran (ch. 3) echoes that of Jerusalem, and the voice of chapter 4 that of “the reporter” in the first half of chapter 1.

58. According to Bier, neither a perspective of penitence nor protest is allowed to become determinative for a reading of the book as a whole. See Miriam J. Bier, “Theological Interpretation and the Book of Lamentations: A Polyphonic Reconsideration,” in *Ears that Hear: Explorations in Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (ed. Joel B. Green and Tim Meadowcroft; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013), 204–22; cf. Knut M. Heim, “The Personification of Jerusalem and the Drama of Her Bereavement in Lamentations,” in *Zion, City of Our God* (ed. Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 129–69.

Carleen R. Mandolfo carries this approach further with her dialogic reading of Lamentations (building on her earlier analysis of the psalms of lament),<sup>59</sup> and she reads chapters 1–2 as a response to the dominant portrait of Zion in prophetic books Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel as the “adulterous” wife of YHWH, so that, in Lamentations, Daughter Zion is given the opportunity to talk back to the wider prophetic tradition. One significant observation made by her is that the “Didactic Voice” (basically equivalent to the first poetic singer of Nancy Lee) does not take God’s part or defend YHWH’s goodness and justice. Though acknowledging some responsibility on Zion’s part for what has happened to her (1:5, 8), the Didactic Voice shows empathy with the pain of Daughter Zion and at least to some extent adopts her point of view (e.g., 1:17; 2:1–2),<sup>60</sup> so that this could be viewed as an adjustment of the Jeremianic tradition. The Didactic Voice dominates chapter 2 (2:1–19), but it is (according to Kathleen O’Connor) “an altered voice” who no longer attributes blame to the city,<sup>61</sup> and Daughter Zion is again allowed to speak (2:20–22). So too, the male figure who laments in chapter 3 (esp. 3:1–20; cf. Jer 20:14–18) can be viewed as an adjustment of the persona of Jeremiah. He acts, in effect, as a representative of the suffering Daughter Zion, who does not speak for herself in that chapter but whose grievous suffering is acknowledged and felt (e.g., 3:48; 51).<sup>62</sup> In other words, the enjambment of Jeremiah and Lamentations results in a rapprochement between the prophet and the people whom he roundly condemned in his prophecy.

### *Lamentations as a Prophetic Book*

In the Greek canon, Lamentations is read as a prophetic book with other prophetic books (chiefly Jeremiah) as its conversation partners. With

59. Carleen R. Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations* (SemeiaST 58; Atlanta: SBL, 2007), 26. She states, “Dialogic reading practices highlight the Bible’s multiple, conflicting, and complementary voices and thus insist on readings that refuse to privilege one point of view”; cf. idem, *God in the Dock: Dialogic Tension in the Psalms of Lament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002).

60. Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back*, 74–76; cf. Miller, “Reading Voices,” 397–400; Mary L. Conway, “Daughter Zion: Metaphor and Dialogue in the Book of Lamentations,” in *Daughter Zion*, 104–113. Conway sees a movement toward a more compassionate understanding of the miserable condition of Daughter Zion.

61. Kathleen O’Connor, “Voices Arguing about Meaning,” in *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts*, 30.

62. Bezzel, “Man of Constant Sorrow,” 263.

regard to books other than the prophecy of Jeremiah, scholars have found affinities between Lamentations and Ezekiel, with both books giving graphic descriptions of Jerusalem as “widow” and degraded wife (Lam 1:1, 2; 2:15; Ezek 16:6, 8, 14), and in both she is likened to “a filthy thing” (גדה) (Lam 1:8, 17; Ezek 36:17).<sup>63</sup> So too, the message of judgment that the prophet Ezekiel was given to proclaim to the rebellious house of Israel, written on a scroll, consisted of “lamentations (קנים) and mourning and woe” (2:10). According to Westermann, “Calling the announcement a dirge has the effect of anticipating the [community’s] destruction,”<sup>64</sup> though most of the other occurrences of קנה in Ezekiel concern the judgment of foreign nations (19:1, 14; 26:17; 27:2; 28:12; 32:2, 16).

A hermeneutical implication of the placement of Lamentations in the Greek tradition is that the personification of the city of Jerusalem as female in Lamentations using a number of בת (“daughter”) designations (most pronounced in chs. 1–2) is to be read within the wider prophetic tradition (e.g., Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Zephaniah).<sup>65</sup> However, in contrast to that tradition, wherein it is mainly found in judgment oracles, in Lamentations the portrayal of Zion as female is used as a vehicle for an empathetic portrayal of the suffering city.<sup>66</sup> Similarities between Lamentations and Isa 40–55 include Zion’s depiction as a widow and a mother bereaved of her children (Lam 1:5, 16; Isa 54:4; 51:18).<sup>67</sup> According to Patricia Tull Willey, Isa 52:11 (“Depart, depart, go out thence, touch no unclean thing”) cites and reverses the formula found in Lam 4:15.<sup>68</sup> God himself is not given a voice in Lamentations, but he could be understood to respond to Zion’s cries of pain in what is found in

63. Julie Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel: The City as Yahweh’s Wife* (SBLDS 130; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 58, 59.

64. Claus Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretations* (trans. Charles Muenchow; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 3.

65. See Elizabeth C. Boase, *The Fulfilment of Doom? The Dialogic Interaction between the Book of Lamentations and the Pre-Exilic/Early Exilic Prophetic Literature* (LHBOTS 437; New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 51–104.

66. Boase, *The Fulfilment of Doom?*, 101–04.

67. Norman K. Gottwald, *Studies in the Book of Lamentations* (SBT 1/14; London: SCM, 1954), 44–46; cf. Elsie R. Stern, *From Rebuke to Consolation: Exegesis and Theology in the Liturgical Anthology of the Ninth of Av Season* (BJS 338; Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2004), 54–58; Patricia Tull Willey, *Remember the Former Things: The Recollection of Previous Texts in Second Isaiah* (SBLDS 161; Atlanta: Scholars, 1997), 89, 106–9.

68. Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 125–30.



Isa 40–55, which open with the divine command to “Comfort (נחם), comfort my people . . . speak tenderly to Jerusalem” (40:1, 2),<sup>69</sup> whereas five times in Lamentations it is said that Zion has no one to comfort (נחם) her,<sup>70</sup> with this motif given prominence by the refrain-like accumulation of the references in chapter 1 (1:2, 9, 16, 17, 21).<sup>71</sup> Johan Renkema may be right to find in Lam 1:21 an implicit appeal to YHWH by Daughter Zion for comfort, seeing there is no one else to comfort her.<sup>72</sup> Later, the poet in 2:13 expresses a desire to comfort Jerusalem (וּאֲנַחֲמָךְ) but confesses that he does not know how to do so, which implies that comfort, if it is to occur, must be provided by God himself.<sup>73</sup>

Linafelt also finds a (belated) response to Zion’s petitions on behalf of her children in Isa 40–55,<sup>74</sup> with the promise of the return of the exiles (depicted as children) to Zion (49:14–26). The opening of this section (49:14: “But Zion said: ‘The LORD has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me’”) reads like an almost exact quote from the unanswered question of Lam 5:20 (“Why dost thou forget us for ever, why dost thou so long forsake us?” RSV).<sup>75</sup> As well, the portrait of the Suffering Ser-

69. Kathleen M. O’Connor, “‘Speak Tenderly to Jerusalem’: Second Isaiah’s Reception and Use of Daughter Zion,” *PSB* 20 (1999): 286, 287; R. B. Salters, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Lamentations* (ICC; London: T & T Clark, 2010), 40, 101; Carol A. Newsom, “Response to Norman K. Gottwald, ‘Social Class and Ideology in Isaiah 40–55,’” *Semeia* 59 (1992): 76; Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, “Lamentations in Isaiah 40–55,” in *Great is Thy Faithfulness?: Reading Lamentations as Sacred Scripture* (ed. Robin A. Parry and Heath A. Thomas; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 55–63; idem, “Geography and Textual Allusions: Interpreting Isaiah xl–lv and Lamentations as Judahite Texts,” *VT* 57 (2007): 373, 374.

70. Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back*, 104. For a full discussion of Isa 40–55 as a response to the pained speech of Lamentations, see *ibid.*, 103–19; Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 130–32.

71. The interaction of these texts is also a feature of the Jewish lectionary cycle of synagogue prophetic readings (*Haftarot*). See Stern, *From Rebuke to Consolation*, 17–77.

72. Johan Renkema, *Lamentations* (Historical Commentary on the Old Testament; Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 193. On the institution of the “comforter” (מְנַחֵם), see Saul M. Olyan, *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 46–49.

73. This implication is noted also by Xuan Huong Thi Pham, *Mourning in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 302; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 135.

74. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 62–79.

75. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 72, 73; Parry, *Lamentations*, 164; Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 233, 234.

vant in Isa 50 and 53 bears some relation to the representative suffering (male) figure of Lam 3 (e.g., giving his cheek to the attacker [Isa 50:6; cf. Lam 3:30]).<sup>76</sup> Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer asks the vital question as to the adequacy of the answers provided in Isa 40–55,<sup>77</sup> and, at least for Mandolfo, they are not adequate, since they are at best a partial answer, for the suffering of Jerusalem seems out of proportion to her moral culpability.

Observations about links between Lamentations and other prophetic books are often made in the context of the exploration of composition of biblical books, and, even more recently, in the pursuit of studies in intertextuality, but the direction of influence, dependence, or borrowing is often difficult to determine with any degree of certainty. Benjamin D. Sommer is right to counsel caution in making assumptions,<sup>78</sup> though he himself, for example, views Isa 62:6–7 as alluding to and reversing the lament in Lam 2:17–19, and Isa 51:17–23 as utilizing Lam 2:13–19 for the same purpose of responding to the laments of the book of Lamentations, with the evidence of the suggested link being shared vocabulary and themes.<sup>79</sup> However, determining the exact sequence of who has been reading and reacting to what is not an essential goal when considering the implications of biblical book order as a paratextual phenomenon, for the focus is not on authors or redactors but on what ancient readers thought about the book.

#### ANCIENT READERS AND MODERN READERS

This study has proceeded on the assumption that the placement of biblical books is an intentional choice by canonical framers, reflecting the habits and convictions of an ancient reading community. Recognition that the biblical paratext represents an *interpretation* of the text means that the paratext does not have to be viewed as *mandating* a particular location for the book of Lamentations. Likewise, the existence of different canonical orders warns the reader against prescribing one order as determinative for interpretation. The order of the biblical books is a paratextual phenomenon that cannot be put on the same level as the text

76. Willey, *Remember the Former Things*, 214–28; Jill Middlemas, “Did Second Isaiah Write Lamentations III?” *VT* 56 (2006): 505–25.

77. Tiemeyer, “Lamentation in Isaiah 40–55,” 61.

78. Benjamin Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusions in Isaiah 40–66* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 127.

79. *Ibid.*, 128.

itself. It represents a fossilization of the evaluations of ancient readers, and this precludes the idea that one order of books (Hebrew or Greek) has absolute priority over another. To give exclusive rights to any particular order of books would be to fail to recognise the character of paratext as post-authorial *commentary* on the text. A further reason that the canonical order cannot be allowed to dictate the meaning of a book is that this would relieve contemporary readers of their obligation to interpret the Scriptures for themselves.

On the other hand, hermeneutical responsibility includes the requirement to consider (and not lightly dismiss) the insights of previous generations of readers. The alternate positions assigned to Lamentations potentially provide valuable insights and suggest exegetical alternatives that deserve serious consideration by contemporary readers, and I believe that the present study has shown this to be the case. As we have seen, in the Hebrew canon, the perennial relevance of Lamentations for times of suffering is enshrined by its placement among the *Megillot*, which reflects its periodic reading. The other four books in the *Megillot* can be understood as affirming the intimations of hope in Lamentations. This canonical context encourages an interpretation of the national and religious crisis as likely to be finally resolved. In the Greek canon, the conversation partners of Lamentations are other prophetic books. The different prophetic books may be viewed as reacting and responding to each other, and the result is that comfort is offered by the prophets to the disconsolate Daughter of Zion depicted in Lamentations. It also allows a rereading of the prophecy of Jeremiah, and the prophet is shown to sympathise with the plight of the judged city and nation.