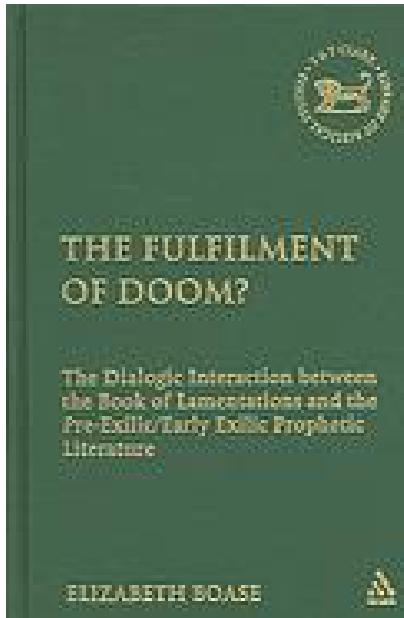


RBL 08/2007



Boase, Elizabeth

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

Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 437

New York: T&T Clark, 2006. Pp. x + 268. Hardcover.
\$150.00. ISBN 0567026728.

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The present work is a slightly revised version of the author's dissertation completed at Murdoch University under the direction of Suzanne Boorer. As indicated by the subtitle, Boase seeks to explain the nature of the literary relationship between Lamentations and prior prophetic works and the implications of this relationship on the assessment of the theological perspectives in the book of Lamentations. In order to accomplish this, the author proposes to employ some of the insights of Mikhail Bakhtin.

The lengthy introduction in chapter 1 consists of three areas of review that are foundational to Boase's argument. In the first part of the introduction she gives a helpful review of earlier work on Lamentations in which she views Gottwald's *Studies in the Book of Lamentations* (1954) as a watershed in critical study of the book. Prior to Gottwald's important work, attention was paid almost exclusively to the issues of date, authorship, and the *Sitz(en)* of the individual units. The author sees Lamentations as resisting firm conclusions as to the date of composition but proceeds on the conviction that a date in the period following 586 B.C.E. is most probable. Likewise, she finds it difficult to discern whether Lamentations is the product of single or multiple authorship, although "there is merit in reading the book as a unity, albeit a unity in which a multiplicity of viewpoints is present" (22). In terms of theological outlook, Boase holds that Lamentations is a

multivoiced text that interacts with Israel's prophetic traditions. Therefore, she seeks to understand the theological perspectives of the book in relationship to other viewpoints, both external and internal. To do this, she has chosen to examine three aspects of Lamentations: the personification of Jerusalem as female; the "Day of YHWH"; and sin and judgment. The second section of the opening chapter introduces the work of the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, especially ways in which it has been previously applied to biblical studies. The three Bakhtinian concepts that Boase finds most helpful for biblical studies are dialogism, polyphony, and double-voicing. These concepts allow a piece of literature such as Lamentations to be understood as an "unfinalizable" conversation between multiple voices. The final section of the introduction discusses attempts to delineate the structure and genre of Lamentations.

In chapter 2, Boase attempts to coordinate the personification of Jerusalem as female in Lamentations with prior personifications in the prophetic literature. To do this, she surveys the portrayals of Jerusalem in Isa 1–39, Micah, Jeremiah, and Zephaniah. One of the key conclusions in comparing the personification of Jerusalem in the prophetic literature and in Lamentations is that the latter increases the intensity of the personification in order to elicit empathy from the audience and to shift the primary portrayal of Jerusalem from a judged city to a city in need of comfort and sympathy.

Chapter 3 examines the motif of the "Day of YHWH" within the prophetic literature and then compares the results to the use of the motif in Lamentations. The prophetic works considered are, in order, Amos, Isa 1–39, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Ezekiel. She finds diverse presentations of the "Day of YHWH" in the prophetic texts but also sees a chronological development. By the end of the seventh century, the contexts in which the phrase occurs more frequently employ war imagery, make reference to YHWH's wrath, and describe the effects of the day on those who experience it. In Lamentations, the "Day of YHWH" is understood in relation to the fall of Jerusalem and lacks cosmic or eschatological dimensions. The relationship between Lamentations and the earlier prophetic texts parallels what was found in chapter 2. In Lamentations, there is greater emphasis on the effects of the day and less on the cause(s) of the day. The impact is described in more personal terms, both for Zion and for her inhabitants. Thus, Boase argues, in Lamentations the "Day of YHWH" motif is subverted in order to evoke sympathy through the expression of suffering.

In chapter 4 she turns to a comparison of the nature of "sin and judgment" in the prophetic literature and in Lamentations. Because sin and judgment are pervasive in the prophetic texts, Boase focuses the discussion on how this motif functions in the texts examined in the previous two chapters on the personification of Jerusalem and the "Day of YHWH." She argues that common among all the sources are the convictions that

YHWH is active in history and punishes sin in both Israel/Judah and among the nations. Yet there is variety in the relative weighting of descriptions of sin and descriptions of the punishment for them. In terms of YHWH's response to sin, the most common mode of expression was one where the nature of the punishment corresponded to the nature of the sin(s) and this correspondence was a product of a judicial decision by YHWH. Another minor motif found in the prophets is the understanding of sin and judgment in terms of act-consequence, that is, that sinful acts by their very nature produce bad consequences. In Lamentations, on the other hand, the relationship between sin and judgment is ambiguous, although there is uniform agreement that YHWH is sovereign and thus ultimately responsible for Jerusalem's fate. Nevertheless, a dialogic tension emerges in that some passages seem to accept the view that YHWH had punished Jerusalem because of sin while others seem to protest that the extent of the suffering was disproportionate to the sin being punished. Therefore, Lamentations is similar to prophetic understandings, especially Micah and Jeremiah, but also challenges them. By refusing to specify the sins committed, the author inhibits the perspective of juridical correspondence found among the prophets.

Chapter 5 builds on the previous chapters to explore how Lamentations functions as a dialogic text. The insights of Bakhtin are most recognizable in this chapter as Boase moves through all five chapters of Lamentations and identifies the multiple voices therein, their respective concerns, and how they stand in dialogic tension with each other and with the prophetic texts explored in the previous three chapters. Lamentations 3 and 5, which had played relatively minor roles up to this point, receive a more comprehensive treatment here. Although Lam 1 stands closest to the prophetic corpus in terms of ideology, the balance between acceptance of those traditions and protest continues to shift as the book develops and chapter 5 leaves the struggle open-ended.

The strength of this study is that it illuminates a number of aspects of the book of Lamentations, and the model of viewing the book through dialogic tensions seems to this reviewer to be particularly fruitful, especially in assessing how theology is done within a text having such an emphasis on the expression of suffering. Boase's identification and description of multiple voices held in tension throughout the book is convincing and is a significant contribution to the study of Lamentations.

However, I have several reservations related to the texts that are held to be roughly contemporaneous with Lamentations. First, it is notable that in the introduction the author discusses date and authorship but not provenance, even though this would seem to be an important component of the rhetorical environment of Lamentations. If Lamentations is in fact to be located in the vicinity of Jerusalem, in what way are texts of Babylonian provenance, such as portions of Ezekiel, part of that rhetorical environment?

Obviously, there could be interaction between texts from Jerusalem and Babylon, as the studies of Tull and Sommer have shown with respect to Lamentations and Deutero-Isaiah, but a discussion of this potential complication would have been desirable.

Second, for texts about which there is disagreement in terms of dating, it is surprising how little argumentation is offered to support the inclusion of some texts in the discussion. In many cases the majority opinion on dating a given pericope is followed, but in some cases texts are included in the discussion on tenuous grounds. For example, Zephaniah is treated as a background to Lamentations throughout the study, and Boase acknowledges that dates ranging from the seventh to the third century have been proposed for the book. Yet she states that, “if we are to assume that at least some of the material comes from the late seventh and sixth century, Zephaniah can provide information about the intellectual world of this period” (77). But instead of arguing what portions of Zephaniah should be considered preexilic, Boase goes on to treat the *entire* book as though it were. She acknowledges that 3:1–13 and 3:14–20 are considered separate units but includes both as earlier than Lamentations by noting that there is a compositional unity to the chapter (78 n. 107). She does not address the many commentators who place verses 14–20 in the late exilic or postexilic period, in which case compositional unity could indicate that the whole third chapter has received extensive postexilic redaction and thus would complicate its inclusion considerably. This handling of Zeph 3 becomes even more problematic in the following chapter on the “Day of YHWH,” where 3:14–20 is the sole representative of a perspective considered as background for Lamentations (127).

These criticisms do not detract from the often insightful rhetorical analysis of the texts in question, but they do suggest that certain elements of Boase’s discussion might be better situated in a synchronic discussion of different viewpoints found in Israelite literature or in the mode of a canonical conversation between texts rather than in a model of the diachronic interaction of these motifs.