

# Introduction

EVERY LIFE, AND EVERY land and people, has reasons for lament and complaint. This collection of essays explores the biblical foundations and the contemporary resonances of lament literature. The editors of this book and many of its contributors have strong connections with Aotearoa, New Zealand. It is fitting, therefore, that the book begins with a lament liturgy responding to the recent Christchurch earthquake (22 February 2011). It ends with a piece considering the “Holy Land” through the eyes of the Shulamith of the Song of Songs. Between these framing laments, a variety of responses to tragedy and a world out of joint are explored. These responses arise from Scripture, from within the liturgy of the church, and from beyond the church; in contemporary life (the racially conflicted land of Aotearoa-New Zealand, secular music concerts, and cyber-space). The book thus reflects upon theological and pastoral handling of such experience, as it bridges these different worlds. It brings together in conversation specialists from different fields of academy and church to provide a resource for integrating faith and scholarship in dark places.

The biblical material in the first section (Foundations) offers new contributions to scholarship on Jeremiah, Lamentations, and Job; and ongoing discussion of the relationship between lament and penitential prayer in the Old Testament. Tim Bulkeley begins by questioning the very nature and nuance of the terms “lament,” “complaint,” and “confession,” with reference to the book of Jeremiah. Miriam J. Bier's essay on the place of Lamentations 4 in the book of Lamentations contributes to the growing scholarly interest in the book of Lamentations, drawing particular attention to chapter 4's vital role in the book. The essays by Will Kynes and Carlos Patrick Jimenez offer detailed investigations of aspects of lament personified in Job: the relecture of Ps 22 in Job; and metaphor in Job; respectively. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, Liz Boase, and Donald P.

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Moffat each discuss the move from lament to penitential prayer in the Old Testament. These pieces are significant for both their similarities and differences of approach and conclusions, and demonstrate that the question of the relationship between lament and penitential prayer is still a live debate.

The middle sections of the book offer a bridge between the foundations of biblical scholarship, and the contexts in which lament might be used and framed in contemporary society. The “Reflections” section pays particular attention to expressions of lament in the church. Robin Parry's reflections on possibilities for lament in the church give way to seasoned liturgist Colin Buchanan's examples of lament liturgy used in specific situations in Jersey and Japan. The third section (Explorations) offers possibilities for expressing lament into contemporary situations into which the biblical lament tradition might speak. Here settings beyond the church are explored. Alistair McKenzie and Jeanette Mathews offer reflections on lament from very different cultural contexts: Aotearoa-New Zealand; and Karen refugee camps on the border of Thailand; respectively. Stephen Garner moves decisively into the twenty-first century with possibilities for lament in a technological age, pointing out examples of lament in cyberspace. Steve Taylor and Liz Boase's joint piece explores the use of biblical lament motifs in public, secular contexts, to express communal grief at overwhelming tragedy. Taylor and Boase examine U2's handling of the Pike River coal mine disaster in West Coast New Zealand in an Auckland concert; and Paul Kelly's moving tribute to victims of the bush fires in Victoria, Australia, at a relief concert in Melbourne.

The closing “Refraction” engages, autobiographically, lament in the land of Israel/Palestine. Yael Klangwisan provides a deeply personal lament steeped in the land and literature of the Shulamith. She evokes a poetic and political world, expressive of ongoing tensions and need for lament. The collection is thus framed with laments from two lands: Aotearoa, New Zealand, fondly known as “Godzone” (God's Own Country); and the Holy Land, considered God's own land in an entirely different, and contested, way.