

The Steinsaltz Tanakh

Tanakh Translation and Commentary

Megillat Eikha **Lamentations**

Commentary by

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Steinsaltz Center



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Megillat Eikha

INTRODUCTION TO LAMENTATIONS

According to tradition, the book of Lamentations was authored by the prophet Jeremiah.¹ However, the Sages explain that in fact it was Barukh ben Neriya the scribe, Jeremiah’s friend, who wrote the book, based on the words of Jeremiah.² This book does not contain a running narrative or description of events, but rather consists of lamentations over the downfall of Israel: the killings, famine, exile, and sufferings of the Jewish people.

These lamentations are usually understood as specifically addressing the destruction of the Temple, but this interpretation is not absolute. Although they are lamentations for the downfall of an entire kingdom and describe the departure of the nation into exile, they are actually missing an explicit and detailed description of the destruction of the Temple. It is therefore possible that a large portion of these lamentations were written prior to the destruction of the Temple. Support for this suggestion can be found in a verse elsewhere in the Bible that describes the aftermath of the death of King Yoshiya, decades before the destruction of Jerusalem: “And Jeremiah lamented Yoshiya, and all the male and female singers spoke of Yoshiya in their lamentations until this day, and they made them a statute over Israel, and behold, they are written in the lamentations.”³ This indicates that many years before the destruction of the Temple, a collection of lamentations was compiled in which those of Jeremiah over the death of Yoshiya appeared. It would seem, therefore, that the earlier compilation of lamentations is in fact the book of Lamentations. The downfall of Yoshiya is especially fitting as the subject of the third lamentation, which is unique with regard to its length and structure.⁴

The death of King Yoshiya signified the conclusion of an era. This was understood by those with foresight who lived at the time, despite the fact that, in practice, Yoshiya’s three sons as well as his grandson reigned in Judah after his death. During the reigns of Yoshiya’s successors, Jerusalem was conquered twice, once by the Egyptians, who exiled the king of Judah, and later by the Babylonians, who after an extended siege took another king captive. Repeated attempts to rebel against Babylonian rule did not succeed. It is therefore certainly possible that the military defeat at Megiddo in which Yoshiya was killed was already perceived as the beginning of the end of the kingdom of Judah.

The lamentations in this book do not describe an absolute destruction or the final end of the Jewish people. Rather, alongside mourning, themes of hope for consolation in the future are also present. Nevertheless, the catastrophic nature of the downfall is not in doubt, and the lamenter does not anticipate the kingdom’s revival in the near future. Consolation is only for the distant future. It is therefore understandable that these lamentations were written down for future generations, and it is logical that their recitation has become a permanent custom among the Jewish people.

Most of the lamentations were written according to an alphabetical acrostic arrangement, with some minor departures. Only the final chapter does not use this acrostic method; even so, it consists of twenty-two verses, just like all the others. This highly stylized method of writing attests to the fact that the contents of the book were composed deliberately, rather than being a spontaneous emotional outpouring. Their form may also indicate an awareness that they would be read on a regular basis. Even one in the midst of mourning, who has difficulty finding the appropriate words to articulate his or her pain, will be able to find an appropriate expression of his emotions within this book.

מגילת
איכה

Megillat
Eikha

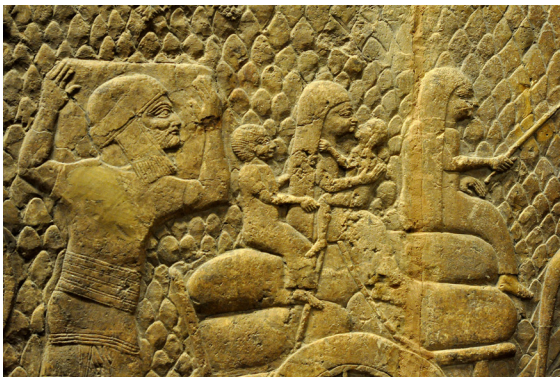
Jerusalem

LAMENTATIONS 1:1–22

This lamentation depicts the miserable condition of Jerusalem in its destroyed state in comparison with its past eminence. The lamenter describes the loneliness, siege, famine, killing, robbery, captivity, and exile of the inhabitants of the city, as well as the degradation of the city itself. Three times the lamenter pauses in his harsh descriptions and cries out to God, that He should see what He has done. The lamenter is not complaining or accusing God; on the contrary, toward the end of the lamentation he justifies the divine sentence that was passed against Jerusalem due

to the sins of its inhabitants. Still, in his cries to Heaven, he expresses his bewilderment at the harshness of the punishment. The lamentation ends with a plea for revenge against Judah's enemies.

- 1 **How does the once greatly crowded city** of Jerusalem now sit alone? **She has become** without support, **like a widow**.^D Great and important **among the nations**,⁵ a princess, ruler, and minister **among the states**: **She has become a vassal**, subservient to others! Jerusalem, which was the seat of a great and glorious kingdom, has completely lost its prestige.
- 2 **She**, the helpless widow, Jerusalem, **weeps at night**, as she is ashamed to weep in the daytime when people can see her, **and her tears are on her cheeks**. She attempts to hide her tears from the eyes of strangers. **Of all her lovers**, or political allies, **she has no one to comfort her**. **All her allies have betrayed her; they have become her enemies**; all the countries that had friendly relationships with her abandoned her after her downfall.
- 3 **Judah has been exiled in affliction and in great enslavement**. **She has settled among the nations, finding no rest**, because **all her pursuers**, her perpetual enemies, who had borne animosity toward her for generations, **have overtaken her**. They seized the opportunity to take revenge against her while she was pressed **within the straits**, narrow areas with no escape routes.⁶



Men and women going into exile on a wagon, Lakhish reliefs, Nineveh, 701 BCE

- 4 In normal times, the roads to Jerusalem were busy, particularly during the pilgrimage festivals when all of Israel would travel there. But now, **the ways**, the roads, **of Zion mourn**, they are desolate, **without pilgrims to the festival**; **all her gates are desolate**; **her priests sigh**, as the city is destroyed and the Temple is deserted.⁷ **Her young women are melancholy**, and **she is embittered**.
- 5 **Her besiegers are ascendant**, **her enemies are tranquil**, for the Lord has tormented her for her abundant transgressions; **her infants are led into captivity before the besieger**, at the time of Yehoyakhin's exile to Babylonia.
- 6 **All her splendor has gone out of the daughter of Zion**. Her free and esteemed **princes are hungry and lost**, **like deer that have not found pasture**.⁸ **They went powerless before the pursuer**; they were led into captivity by their new masters.



Hunting deer, relief at the Palace of Ashurbanipal, Nineveh, 645–635 BCE

- 7 **In the days of her affliction and her wretchedness**, her suffering,⁹ **Jerusalem recalled all her delights that were from the days of old**. At the moment of her downfall, Jerusalem remembers the good days of yesteryear. **With the fall of her people into the hand of the besieger**, **with no one to help her**, **the besiegers saw her; they mocked her deficiencies**. Even those who did not actively participate in her destruction took pleasure in her downtrodden state.

א איכה ו יִשְׁבֶּה בְּדָד הָעִיר רַבָּתִי עִם הִיתָה כְּאַלְמָנָה רַבָּתִי בְּגוֹיִם שְׂדֵתִי בְּמִדְיָנוֹת
ב הִיתָה לְמָס׃ כָּכֹ תִבְכֶּה בַּלַּיְלָה וּדְמָעָתָה עַל לַחֲיָהּ אֵין־לָהּ מִנְחָם מִכָּל־אֱהָבֶיהָ
ג כָּל־דַּעֲיָהּ בָּגְדוּ בָּהּ הָיוּ לָהּ לְאֵיבִים׃ גָּלְתָה יְהוּדָה מֵעֵנִי וּמִרְבַּע עֲבֹדָהּ הִיא יֹשֶׁבֶת
ד בְּגוֹיִם לֹא מִצָּאָה מָנוּחַ כָּל־רִדְפֶיהָ הִשְׁגִּיגָה בֵּין הַמְּצָרִים׃ דֶּרֶכֶי צִיּוֹן אֲבֵלוֹת
ה מִבְּלוֹ בָּאִי מוֹעֵד כָּל־שְׂעָרֶיהָ שׁוֹמְמִין כִּהְנִיָּה נֶאֱנָחִים בְּתוֹלְתֶיהָ נוֹגֹת וְהִיא
ו מִדְּלָה׃ הָיוּ צָרֶיהָ לְרֹאשׁ אֵיבֶיהָ שָׁלוּ כִּי־יִהְיֶה הַגָּה עַל־רֹב פְּשָׁעֶיהָ עוֹלָלֶיהָ
ז הִלְכוּ שְׁבִי לִפְנֵי־צָר׃ וַיֵּצֵא מִן בֶּת־צִיּוֹן כָּל־הַדָּרָה הָיוּ שְׂרָיָה כְּאֵילִים לֹא־מִצָּאוּ
ח מִרְעָה וַיִּלְכוּ בְּלֹא־כֹחַ לִפְנֵי רוֹדֶף׃ זָכְרָה יְרוּשָׁלַם יְמֵי עֲנִיָּה וּמִרוּדֶיהָ כֹּל מַחֲמֻדֶיהָ
ט אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ מִימֵי קֹדֶם בְּנִפְלַעַם עָמָה בִּיד־צָר וְאֵין עֲזֹרָה לָהּ רְאוּהָ צָרִים שָׁחֲקוּ עַל־
י מִשְׁבֹּתָהּ׃ חֲטָא חֲטָאָה יְרוּשָׁלַם עַל־כֵּן לָנִידָה הִיתָה כָּל־מְכַבְּדֶיהָ הִזְלִיחָהּ
כ פִּי־דָאוּ עֲרוֹתֶיהָ גַם־הִיא נֶאֱנָחָה וּתְשֹׁב אַחֲזֹר׃ טִמְאַתָּה בְּשׁוּלֶיהָ לֹא זָכְרָה

- 8 **A sin has Jerusalem sinned; therefore she has become a pariah**.^D **All who honored her have demeaned her**, because **they saw her nakedness**; her shortcomings and agonies have been exposed to all.¹⁰ **Even she herself sighs and has regressed**. She has become weak and therefore does not actively

respond; instead, she sighs and resigns herself to her misery and desolation.

- 9 **Her impurity**, the blood of her menstruation, **is perceptible on the edges of her skirts**, the hems of her garment; in other words, her sins are obvious. **She had not considered** the fact

DISCUSSION

1:1 | **She has become like a widow**: In its simple sense, the verse is declaring Jerusalem akin to a widow simply because she is devoid of protection and her status has become low. But there is also a sense that the city's "husband," God, has abandoned her. A similar expression is found in the last lamentation (5:3): "We have become orphans, fatherless; our mothers are like widows." This verse can be read literally, but it can also be seen as an allegory of the sense of orphanhood felt by the people of

the city toward their Father in Heaven; the subjective feeling of Jerusalem, or the people of Israel, that they have been abandoned forever (Rashi; *Targum Yonatan*; *Eikha Rabba* 1:3; *Targum Yonatan* and *Pesikta Zutreta* on 5:3; see also Isaiah 54:4–5).

1:8 | **She has become a pariah** [*nidda*]: The Hebrew word *nidda* denotes something kept at a distance or shunned. It is also used to refer to a menstruating woman. Presumably, this usage arose due to the observance of the laws of ritual

purity in Temple times. In order to avoid becoming impure, pure individuals would often avoid menstruating women and others who were ritually impure (see, e.g., Jerusalem Talmud, *Shekalim* 8:1). The imagery used here and in the next verse is of Jerusalem as a shunned menstruating woman. According to the Talmud (*Ta'anit* 20a), this metaphor was chosen to provide a sense of hope for the future: "Just as a menstruating woman will become permitted, so too Jerusalem will be restored."

מחמדיהם

העמים

אחרי־תֵּה וַתֵּרֶד פְּלִאִים אֵין מִנַּחֵם לָהּ רֹאֵה יְהוָה אֶת־עַנְיִי כִּי הִגְדִּיל אוֹיֵב: ידוֹ
פָּרַשׁ צֶרַעַל כָּל־מַחְמַדֶּיהָ כִּי־דָאֲתָהּ גּוֹיִם בָּאוּ מִקְדָּשָׁהּ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָהּ לֹא־יָבֹאוּ
בִקְהָל לֶךְ: כָּל־עַמָּה נֶאֱנָחִים מִבִּקְשֵׁים לֶחֶם נִתְּנוּ מִחֲמוּדֶיהֶם בָּאֵכֶל לְהַשִּׁיב
נַפְשׁ רֹאֵה יְהוָה וְהַפִּיטָהּ כִּי הָיִיתִי זֹלִלָה: לוֹא אֵלִיכֶם כָּל־עֲבָרִי דֶרֶךְ הַפִּיטוּ
וּרְאוּ אִם־יֵשׁ מִכָּאוֹב כְּמִכָּאֲבִי אֲשֶׁר עֹלֵל לִי אֲשֶׁר הוֹגָה יְהוָה בְּיוֹם חֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ:
מִמָּרוֹם שָׁלַח־אֵשׁ בַּעֲצֻמֹּתַי וַיִּרְדָּנָה פֶּרֶשׁ רֶשֶׁת לְרַגְלִי הִשִּׁיבֵנִי אַחֲזֹר נִתְּנִנִי
שִׁמְמָה כָּל־הַיּוֹם דָּוָה: נִשְׁקַד עַל פִּשְׁעֵי בִידִי וַיִּשְׁתַּדְּגוּ עָלַי עַל־צוּאָרֵי הַכִּשְׁיִל
כַּחַי נִתְּנִנִי אֲדֹנָי בִּידֵי לֹא־אוֹכֵל קוֹם: סֵלָה כָּל־אֲבִירִי וְאֲדֹנָי בִּקְרָבִי קָרָא עָלַי
מוֹעֵד לְשֹׁבֵר בַּחוּרֵי גֵת דֶּרֶךְ אֲדֹנָי לְבַתּוּלַת בֵּת־יְהוּדָה: עַל־אַלֶּה וְאֲנִי בֹכִיָּה
עֵינַי וַיִּרְדֶּה מַיִם כִּי־דָחַק מִמֶּנִּי מִנַּחֵם מִשִּׁיב נַפְשִׁי הָיוּ בָנִי שׁוֹמְמִים כִּי גִבֹר
אוֹיֵב: פָּרַשָׁה צִיּוֹן בִּידֶיהָ אֵין מִנַּחֵם לָהּ צוּה יְהוָה לִיעֲקֹב סָבִיבּוּ צָרֵיו הִיתָה
יְרוּשָׁלַם לְנִדָּה בֵּינֵיהֶם: צָדִיק הוּא יְהוָה כִּי פִיהוּ מְרִיתִי שָׁמְעוּ־נָא כָּל־עַמִּים
וּרְאוּ מִכָּאֲבִי בַתּוּלַתִי וּבַחוּרֵי הִלְכוּ בִשְׁבִי: קָרָאתִי לְמַאֲהָבִי הִמָּה רַמּוֹנִי כֹהֲנִי
וְזִקְנִי בָעִיר גּוֹעוּ כִּי־בִקְשׁוּ אֵכֶל לָמוּ וַיִּשִּׁיבוּ אֶת־נַפְשָׁם: רֹאֵה יְהוָה כִּי־צָר־לִי
מֵעֵי חֲמַרְמָרוּ נִהַפְךְ לִבִּי בִּקְרָבִי כִּי מָרוּ מְרִיתִי מִחוּץ שַׁפְּלָה חָרַב בַּבַּיִת כַּמּוֹת:
שָׁמְעוּ כִּי נֶאֱנָחָה אֲנִי אֵין מִנַּחֵם לִי כָּל־אֲיֵבִי שָׁמְעוּ רַעְתִּי שָׁשׂוּ כִּי אֶתָּה עֹשִׂית
הַבָּאָת יוֹם־קָרָאת וַיְהִיו כִּמְנִי: תָּבֹא כָל־רַעְתָּם לִפְנֵיךְ וְעֹלֵל לָמוּ פֶּאֶשֶׁר עֹלֵלָת
לִי עַל כָּל־פִּשְׁעֵי כִי־דַבּוֹת אֲנִיחָתִי וְלִבִּי דוֹי:

20 The lamenter again turns to God, and this time he is apparently representing both himself and Jerusalem as one: **See, Lord, for I am in distress, my innards burn;**²⁸ my entire body hurts, including my innards. I feel as if **my heart is overturned within me, for I have rebelled**, transgressed the word of God. **Outside, the sword bereaves; in the house, it is like death.** Outside the house, people are being killed, but even inside the house, the terror of death is found.

21 **They heard that I sigh; there is no comforter for me; all my enemies heard of my misfortune, were glad at my**

misfortune, **because You acted.** The lamenter now begs:²⁹ Please, **may You bring the day that You proclaimed, and punish them so that they will be like me**, with similar suffering to mine.

22 **Let all their wickedness**, of those who pretended to be my friends and allies, **come before You, and do to them as You did to me for all my transgressions, for my sighs are many and my heart is suffering**, suffering from pain.

that this would be **her end**.¹¹ She has declined extraordinarily, far beyond expectations;¹² **there is no one to comfort her.** Consequently, the lamenter pleads: **See, Lord, my affliction, for the enemy has expanded his power; he acts in Jerusalem as he pleases.**

10 **The besieger spread his hand over all her delights**, i.e., he has taken them, **as she saw the nations entering her Sanctuary**, those nations **whom You had commanded that they should not enter Your assembly**. This is referring to the Amonites and the Moavites, whom the Torah denies even the possibility of conversion to Judaism.¹³ The entry of such banned and inferior nations into the Temple is therefore doubly insulting.¹⁴



"The besieger spread his hand over all her delights." Romans carrying away the Temple vessels in their victory march, stone relief, Arch of Titus, Rome, 82 CE

11 **All her people are sighing, seeking bread** during the siege; **they have given all their delights**, their most valuable items, **for food to sustain**¹⁵ **life**. Again the lamenter requests that God look at him, but now his request is in the name of Jerusalem: **See, Lord, and look, for I have become abject**.¹⁶ Alternatively, the lamenter is saying that the reason people are starving for bread is that in the past the city was full of gluttony.¹⁷

12 Desolate Jerusalem now turns to the people who pass through it unheedingly, and expresses its wishes for them: **May it not befall you, all wayfarers**. Let troubles like mine never befall you.¹⁸ **Behold and see: Is there any pain like my pain, which has been done to me,**¹⁹ **with which the Lord has tormented me on the day of His enflamed wrath?**

13 **From on high He sent fire into my bones, and He crushed them**, flattened and destroyed them. **He spread a net for my feet**, and once I was caught in it, **He set me back. He rendered me desolate, suffering**, ill and in pain, or, distanced like a menstruating woman,²⁰ **all day**.

14 **The yoke of my transgressions is preserved**²¹ **in His hand; the transgressions are becoming entangled, coming upon my neck like a yoke, sapping my strength. The Lord delivered me into the hands of those against whom I cannot stand.**

15 **The Lord trampled**²² **all my mighty in my midst; He proclaimed a festival of many enemies against me** in order to **break my young men; the Lord has trodden the virgin daughter of Judah**, a moniker for the tribe of Judah or the residents of Jerusalem, **in a winepress**. We have all been trampled like grapes by the enemy, and our blood has been spilled like wine in a winepress.²³



Treading in a winepress

16 **For these I weep; my eye, my eye sheds water**, tears, **for a comforter, a king or other savior, restorer of my soul, has grown distant from me. My children have become desolate**, with no guide or supporter, **because the enemy has prevailed**.

17 **Zion spread her hands** as a sign of surrender, defeat, and despair;²⁴ **there was no comforter for her. The Lord has commanded for Jacob that his besiegers surround him** from all sides.²⁵ **Jerusalem has become like a pariah among them**, even more distanced and disgraced.²⁶

18 The lamentation is composed with the mindset of acceptance of God's sentence: **The Lord**, who has done all this to us, **is righteous; His judgment is correct, for I have defied**, transgressed, **His word. Hear now all you peoples**, what God has done to us, **and see my pain: My young women and young men have gone into captivity**.

19 **I called to my lovers**, those who had presented themselves as my friends and allies,²⁷ but **they deceived me**. Meanwhile, **my priests and my elders**, who are usually sustained by public funds (see 4:16), **perished in the city, while they sought food for themselves**, as the public did not have the means to support them during the siege; they tried to **restore their lives** and sustain themselves, but to no avail.



"My young women and young men have gone into captivity." Jews exiled from Lakhish, above left: men, above right: women; Lakhish reliefs, Nineveh, 701 BCE

ב איכה יעיב באפו ו אדני את-בת-ציון השליך משמים ארץ תפארת ישראל
ולא-זכר הדם-דגליו ביום אפו: בלע אדני לא חמל את כל-נאות יעקב הדם
בעברתו מבצרי בת-יהודה הגיע לארץ חלל ממלכה ושריה: גדע בחדרי-אף
כל קרן ישראל השיב אחור ימינו מפני אויב ויבער ביעקב פאש להבה אכלה
סביב: דרך קשתו כאויב נצב ימינו כצד ויהרג כל מחמדי-עין באהל בת-ציון
שפך פאש חמתו: היה אדני ו כאויב בלע ישראל בלע כל-ארמנותיה שחת
מבצרו וירב בבת-יהודה תאניה ואניה: ויחמס כגן שפן שחת מעדו שפח
יהוה ו בציון מועד ושבת וינאץ בזעם-אפו מלך וכהן: זנח אדני ו מזבחו נאד
מקדשו הסגיר ביד-אויב חומת ארמנותיה קול נתנו בבית-יהוה ביום מועד:
חשב יהוה ו להשחית חומת בת-ציון נטה קו לא-השיב ידו מבלע ויאבל-חל
וחומה יחדו אמללו: טבעו בארץ שעריה אבד ושבר בריחיה מלפה ושריה
בגוים אין תורה גם-נביאיה לא-מצאו חזון מיהוה: ישבו לארץ ידמו זקני בת-
ציון העלו עפר על-ראשם חגרו שקים הורידו לארץ ראשן בתולת ירושלים:
כלו בדמעות עיני חמרמרו מעי נשפך לארץ כבדי על-שבר בת-עמי בעטף
עולל ויוזק ברחבות קריה: לאמתם יאמרו איה דגן ויין בהתעטפם כחלל
ברחבות עיר בהשתפך נפשם אל-חיק אמתם: מה-אעודך מה אדמה-לך
הבת ירושלים מה אשוה-לך ואנחמך בתולת בת-ציון כי-גדול פיס שברך

11 The lamenter's distress at the sight of his eyes is so great that he feels as though it physically harms him: **My eyes fail from the many tears; my innards burn.**³⁹ I am overcome with a terrible stomachache; **my liver is poured on the earth over the disaster of the daughter of my people, as the infants and the suckling babes faint in the city squares.**
12 **To their mothers they, the young children, say: Where is grain and if there is no bread, where is there wine to refresh our souls? while fainting like the wounded,** as lifeless corpses

in the city squares, while their souls are poured into their mothers' bosoms.
13 **What shall I attest to you?** What similar case can I cite in order to comfort you?⁴⁰ **To what shall I liken you,** what metaphors can I use in order to explain your situation, **daughter of Jerusalem? To what shall I equate you,** with what can I compare your suffering, and thereby **comfort you, virgin daughter of Zion? For your disaster is as vast as the sea; who can heal you?** No one can.

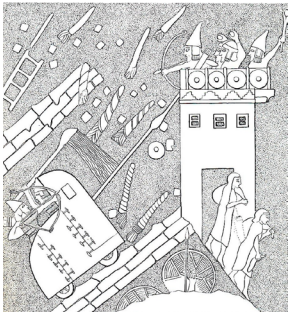
God's Treatment of the Daughter of Zion

LAMENTATIONS 2:1–22

Whereas the previous lamentation emphasized the enemy whom God sent to torment Jerusalem for her sins, this one opens by stressing the lamenter's astonishment at God's affliction of "the daughter of Zion," "the daughter of Jerusalem," and "the daughter of Judah." The word "daughter" appears eleven times in this lamentation. Here, it is God who degrades Israel and its leaders and destroys their homes and fortresses. God appears as an enemy Himself, not only as He who sent the enemy.

The lamenter subsequently accuses the false prophets of Jerusalem of having prevented the inhabitants of Jerusalem from confronting their sins and changing their ways by soothing them with false prophecies. Now, there are no longer any prophecies, and the sounds of rejoicing of those who would come for the pilgrimage festivals no longer emanate from the city. Instead, the sounds that are heard in Jerusalem are those of babies crying for food and drink; the shouts and cries of its defeated inhabitants; expressions of astonishment and sorrow, as well as eulogies, by those who pass through the ruined city; and the voices of enemies rejoicing over Israel's misfortune.

- 2 1 **How the Lord has clouded over the daughter of Zion in His wrath. He cast the splendor of Israel from the heavens to the earth and did not remember His footstool, a flowery metaphor for the Temple,³⁰ on the day of His wrath.**
- 2 **The Lord has demolished and has had no compassion for all the pleasant habitations of Jacob; He destroyed, in His ire, the strongholds of the daughter of Judah. He brought them to the ground;³¹ He profaned, disgraced, and eliminated a kingdom and its princes.**
- 3 **He severed in enflamed wrath all the grandeur of Israel.** In normal times, God protects His nation and does not allow the enemy to do as it wishes toward it; but now, **He retracted His right hand,** which prevents the enemy from harming Israel, **from being before the enemy,** allowing the enemy to act unrestrained,³² **who burned Jacob like flaming fire, consuming all around.**
- 4 **He, God himself, drew His bow against us as an enemy.** Not only did God withhold His hand from restraining the enemy, but **His right hand stood against us as a besieger, and He killed all delights of the eye. In the tent of the daughter of Zion, He poured His fury like fire.**



"He destroyed, in His ire, the strongholds of the daughter of Judah." The siege of Lakhish and the stronghold under attack, Lakhish reliefs, Nineveh, 701 BCE



Arrows stretched for firing, relief at the Palace of Ashurbanipal, Nineveh, 645–635 BCE



"He poured His fury like fire." Burnt room, City of David, Jerusalem, sixth century BCE

- 5 **The Lord was like an enemy; He demolished Israel, demolished all its palaces, destroyed its strongholds, and multiplied sounds of mourning and moaning in the daughter of Judah.**³³
- 6 **He stripped His shrine, His dwelling place,³⁴ picking all its fruits, like a garden;³⁵ He destroyed His place of assembly, or the place where He attended.³⁶ The Lord caused festival and Sabbath to be forgotten in Zion.** The times have become so bitter and hard that the festivals, and even the Sabbaths, are no longer discernable. The routine of life has become poor, dull, and sad. **And He, God, scorned, cursed and harmed, king and priest of Israel in His furious wrath.**
- 7 **The Lord forsook His altar, cursed and ceased to protect His Temple. He gave into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces.** Since the whole city has been delivered to the control of foreigners, **they made a loud noise in the House of the Lord, like a day of festival.** The sounds of the massacre and battle in the Temple brought back memories of voices raised in song and thanks that would emanate from those celebrating the festivals in previous years.³⁷
- 8 **The Lord resolved to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion; He drew, marked a line** in preparation of His plan of action, and **did not withdraw His hand from demolishing,** but implemented His plan. **He caused rampart and wall to mourn, together they languish.**
- 9 **Her gates sank into the ground;** essentially, they have disappeared, because people have stopped using them and therefore they no longer serve any purpose. **He eradicated and broke her bars,** which would have been used to close the gates. **Her king and her princes are exiled among the nations** and cannot help. **There is no Torah; her prophets, too, could not find a vision from the Lord.** All is hidden and unknown. The leaders have gone into exile, and those who are left offer no comfort.
- 10 **The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground, are silent.**³⁸ **They have placed dust on their heads, have girded themselves with sackcloth. The young women of Jerusalem have lowered their heads to the ground.** Both the young and the old mourn.

יְד מִי יִדְפָּא-לָךְ: נְבִיאֶיךָ חָזוּ לָךְ שׁוֹא וְתַפֵּל וְלֹא-גָלוּ עַל-עוֹנֶיךָ לְהַשִּׁיב שְׁבִיתְךָ
וַיַּחֲזוּ לָךְ מִשְׁאוֹת שׁוֹא וּמַדּוּחָם: סָפְקוּ עָלֶיךָ כַּפִּים כַּל-עֲבָרִי דָרְךָ שָׂרְקוּ וַיִּנְעוּ
רֹאשָׁם עַל-בֶּת יְרוּשָׁלַם הַזֹּאת הָעִיר שֶׁיֵּאמְרוּ כְּלִילַת יָפִי מִשׁוֹשׁ לְכָל-הָאָרֶץ:
כָּצוּ עָלֶיךָ פִּיהֶם כָּל-אֲיִבֶיךָ שָׂרְקוּ וַיַּחֲדָקוּ-שֵׁן אָמְרוּ בְּלַעֲנוּ אֹךְ זֶה הַיּוֹם שֶׁקְּוִינָהּ
מִצָּאֵנוּ רֹאיוֹנוֹ: עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר זָמַם בַּעַצ אֲמָרְתוֹ אֲשֶׁר צוּה מִימֵי-קֹדֶם הָרָם
וְלֹא חָמַל וַיִּשְׁמַח עָלֶיךָ אוֹיֵב הָרִים קָרָן צָרִיךְ: צָעַק לִבָּם אֶל-אֲדֹנָי חוֹמַת בֵּית-
צִיּוֹן הוֹרִידִי כִנְחָל דְּמָעָה יוֹמָם וּלְיָלָה אֶל-תַּתְּנִי פּוּגַת לָךְ אֶל-תַּגֵּדִם בֵּית-עֵינֶיךָ:
קוֹמִי וְרַנֵּי בַלֵּיל לְרֹאשׁ אֲשֻׁמְרוֹת שִׁפְכֵי כַמִּים לְבֶךְ נִכַח פָּנַי אֲדֹנָי שְׂאֵי אֱלֹהִי
כַּפֶּיךָ עַל-נַפְשִׁי עוֹלְלֶיךָ הָעֲטוּפִים בְּרָעַב בְּרֹאשׁ כָּל-חוּצוֹת: רֵאֵה יְהוָה וְהִבִּיטָהּ
לְמִי עוֹלֹלָת כֹּה אִם-תֵּאכְלָנָה נָשִׁים פְּרִים עַלְלֵי טַפָּחִים אִם-יִהְיֶה בְּמִקְדָּשׁ אֲדֹנָי
כֹּהֵן וְנְבִיאִים: שִׁכְבוּ לָאָרֶץ חוּצוֹת נֶעֱד וְזָקֵן בְּתוֹלְתֵי וּבַחֲוָרֵי נָפְלוּ בַּחֲרֵב הָרִגְתָּ
בַּיּוֹם אַפָּךְ טַבַּחְתָּ לֹא חָמַלְתָּ: תִּקְרָא כְּלוֹם מוֹעֵד מְגוּרֵי מִסְכֵּיב וְלֹא הָיָה בַּיּוֹם
אֶרֶץ-יְהוָה פְּלִיט וְשָׂרִיד אֲשֶׁר-טַפַּחְתִּי וְרַבִּיתִי אֲיִבֵי כָלָם:
אֲנִי הַגִּבֹּר רֵאֵה עָנִי בְּשֹׁבֵט עֲבָרְתוֹ: אוֹתִי נָהָג וַיִּלָּךְ חֶשֶׁךְ וְלֹא-אוֹר:

- 14 Your prophets, who were not true prophets of God, envisioned and delivered prophecies of futility and foolishness for you, as they had no substance, and did not reveal your iniquity to bring about your rehabilitation, to return you to your previous state. They betrayed their mission, which was to castigate you for your sins and inspire you to repent. Instead, they allowed you to deteriorate and envisioned for you prophecies of futility and deviance, or incitement, which incited you to abandon the correct path.⁴¹ Instead of telling you the hard truth, which would have convinced you to change your ways and repent, your prophets affirmed your behavior, enabling you to continue your evil ways unimpeded.
- 15 All wayfarers clapped their hands at you; they whistled and shook their heads, expressions of grief, at the daughter of Jerusalem. At the sight of your ruin, they wonder: Is this the city that was said to be perfect beauty, the joy of the entire earth?
- 16 All your enemies opened their mouths wide, jeering against you; they whistled and gnashed their teeth, expressions of anger or animosity. They said: We have demolished her; indeed, this is the day for which we hoped, the day of Jerusalem's downfall; now we found it, we saw it.
- 17 The Lord accomplished that which He devised;⁴² He implemented His statement that He commanded from the days of old. He had warned you in His Torah of defeat and destruction, starvation and war, and now His retribution for your sins has come to pass.⁴² He destroyed and had no compassion. He caused the enemy to rejoice over you, raised the horn of your antagonists. He has empowered them in their own eyes.
- 18 Their hearts, the hearts of the city's inhabitants, cried to the Lord. Wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears fall like a

- stream, day and night; do not give yourself respite; let the apple of your eye not cease. Do not allow yourself to stop weeping.⁴³
- 19 The lamenter now turns to Israel: Arise, cry out while eulogizing at night,⁴⁴ at the beginning of the watches. For watchmen, the night is divided into shifts, and the time at the beginning of each shift is opportune for prayer.⁴⁵ Pour out your heart like water, sob uncontrollably during these hours of the night before the face of the Lord over your situation. Lift up your hands to Him in prayer for the life of your infants, who are faint with hunger at the head of every street. Not only the adults are starving to death; even the young children have nothing to eat.
- 20 Like the previous lamentation, this one also concludes with a call to God to see how lowly Jerusalem has become, and once again the lamenter personally identifies with Jerusalem: See, Lord, and behold to whom You have done this. Shall women eat their fruit, the infants of their nurturing? Was it Your intention that the starvation should be so terrible as to cause this to happen? Shall the priest and the prophet be slain in the Temple of the Lord, which is supposed to be a place of refuge? Was that Your intent?
- 21 Lad and elder lay on the ground in the streets; my young women and my young men fell by the sword. You killed on the day of Your wrath; You slaughtered, had no compassion. You have harmed us mercilessly.
- 22 You have called, invited, as on an appointed day, my fears to come from all around, and there was no survivor or remnant on the day of the Lord's wrath. All the houses, gardens, books, public works, and those children whom I nurtured and reared, my enemy annihilated; I remain alone in the world.

The Man Who Views the Suffering of His Nation

LAMENTATIONS 3:1–66

lamentations feature one verse beginning with each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, forming an alphabetic acrostic; here, while the alphabetic acrostic structure is maintained, there are three verses for each letter.

Stylistically, the broad use of first person singular is conspicuous. Although throughout the book of Lamentations there are verses where the prophet speaks of his own personal anguish and pain upon observing the destruction, nevertheless Jerusalem is generally referred to in the third person, sometimes assuming the persona of a woman. This lamentation, by contrast, is recited by a man who considers himself an example and a symbol for the entire nation, and therefore his personal experience is emphasized.

There are further differences between this lamentation and the others that relate to the content: Whereas in the other lamentations the prophet describes the historical context for his feelings, including references to starvation and murder, the physical destruction of Jerusalem, and the enemies inflicting this destruction and rejoicing in it, this lamentation does not present any such descriptions. Instead, it focuses on the lamenter's personal suffering; his wavering between hope and despair; and his fluctuation between surrender and acceptance of the situation on the one hand, and his pain, cries, and struggling on the other. There is no question of "how *eikha* this can have happened," as is found in the other lamentations, only a description of the current situation.

The lamentation ends with a prayer that God deliver appropriate retribution to the enemy for mocking and inflicting destruction on the Jewish people.

- 3 1 I am the man who has seen and suffered affliction by the rod of His fury.⁴⁶ 2 He, God, conducted and led me in darkness and not in light.

DISCUSSION		
2:16–17 All your enemies opened their mouths...The Lord accomplished that which He devised: Although this lamentation, like the other lamentations, is written in alphabetical order, verses 16 and 17 begin with <i>peh</i>	and <i>ayin</i> , respectively, which is contrary to the common order. This change to the alphabetical order appears in the third and fourth lamentations as well (3:46–51; 4:16–17). There are various	interpretive explanations for this phenomenon, but it is possible that in those days the order of the Hebrew alphabet was not entirely fixed (see also <i>Sanhedrin</i> 104b; <i>Eikha Rabba</i> 2:20).

אֲדָבִי יֵשֶׁבֶת יְהוָה יְדוֹ כָּל־הַיּוֹם: בְּלֵה בִשְׂרִי וְעוֹדִי שֹׁבֵר עֲצָמוֹתַי: בָּנָה עָלַי וִיקָף
 רֹאשׁ וּתְלָאָה: בְּמַחֲשָׁבִים הוֹשִׁיבֵנִי כִמְתִי עוֹלָם: גָּדַר בְּעֵדִי וְלֹא אֵצֵא הַכְּבִיד
 נֶחֱשֶׁתִי: גַּם כִּי אֲזַעֵק וְאֲשׁוּעַ שָׁתֵם תִּפְלֹתַי: גָּדַר דְּרָכִי בַּגְזִית נְתִיבֹתַי עוֹה: דָּב
 אֲרֹב הוּא לִי אֲרִיָּה בְּמִסְתָּרִים: דְּרָכִי סוֹדֵר וַיִּפְשְׁחֵנִי שְׁמֵנִי שׁוּמָם: דָּרָךְ קִשְׁתּוֹ
 וַיַּצִּבֵנִי כַּמָּטָא לַחֲץ: הִבִּיא בְּכַלִּיתִי בְּנִי אֲשַׁפְתּוּ: הֵייתִי שֹׁחֵק לְכָל־עַמִּי נְגִינָתָם
 כָּל־הַיּוֹם: הִשְׁבִּיעֵנִי בַּמְרוֹדִים הָרוּנִי לַעֲנָה: וַיִּגְרַם בַּחֲצֵץ שְׁנִי הַכְּפִישָׁנִי בְּאַפֶּר:
 וַתִּזְנַח מִשְׁלוֹם נַפְשִׁי נִשְׁתִּי טוֹבָה: וְאָמַר אֲבָד נַצְחִי וַתּוֹחַלְתִּי מִיְּהוָה: זָכַר־עֲנִי
 וּמְרוֹדִי לַעֲנָה וְרֹאשׁ: זָכוֹר תִּזְכּוֹר וַתִּשָּׁח עָלַי נַפְשִׁי: זֹאת אָשִׁיב אֶל־לִבִּי עַל־
 בֶּן אֹחִיל: חֲסָדֵי יְהוָה כִּי לֹא־תִמְנֶנּוּ כִי לֹא־כָלוּ רַחֲמָיו: חֲדָשִׁים לִבְקָרִים רַבָּה
 אֲמוֹנָתְךָ: חֲלָקִי יְהוָה אָמְרָה נַפְשִׁי עַל־בֶּן אֹחִיל לוֹ: טוֹב יְהוָה לִקְוֹ לְנֶפֶשׁ
 תִּדְרָשֶׁנּוּ: טוֹב וַיַּחִיל וְדוּמָם לַתְּשׁוּעָתָהּ יְהוָה: טוֹב לִגְבֹר כִּי־יִשָּׂא עַל בְּנֵעוּרָיו:
 יֵשֶׁב בְּדָד וַיִּדָּם כִּי נָטַל עָלָיו: יִתֵּן בַּעֲפָר פִּיהוּ אוֹלִי יֵשׁ תִּקְוָה: יִתֵּן לְמַבְהוֹ לַחִי
 יִשְׁבַּע בַּחֲדָפָה: כִּי לֹא יִזְנַח לְעוֹלָם אֲדֹנָי: כִּי אִם־הוֹגָה וְרַחֵם כָּרֹב חֲסָדּוֹ: כִּי לֹא

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BACKGROUND

3:5 | **Gall [rosh]:** *Rosh* is commonly identified as hemlock, *Conium maculatum*, an extremely poisonous plant that was used for the execution of criminals in ancient Greece. An herbaceous plant of the Apiaceae family that reaches a height of 1.5 m, hemlock has white flowers and its stalk is speckled with black spots; it grows wild, typically by the roadside or on the edges of cultivated fields. Others identify *rosh* as the opium poppy, *Papaver somniferum*. The fruit of the poppy resembles a head [*rosh*], and it is used to produce opium. Alternatively, *rosh* might be golden henbane, *Hyoscyamus aureus*, which also contains a strong poison.

3:15 | **Wormwood [la'ana]:** *La'ana* is commonly identified with wormwood, *Artemisia absinthium*, which is common in Israel. The plant's flowers are yellow, and it reaches a height and width of 1.5 m. Alternatively, *la'ana* is a generic term for various bitter or poisonous plants.

DISCUSSION

3:14 | **A laughingstock to all my people, their song:** This verse can be seen as a description of the suffering of the prophets due to the way they were perceived by the people, as demonstrated in the verse: "The prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit is mad" (Hosea 9:7). Unlike the metaphors used in the previous verses, this one relates to the actual reality of the prophet's life and his standing among his

listeners. He was confined to a hopeless existence, where the people around him would shoot arrows of derision at him.

3:23 | **New every morning, great is the trust in You:** Jews recite the following passage, based on this verse, every morning upon waking up: I offer thanks before You, living and eternal King, for You have mercifully restored my soul within me; Your faithfulness is great.

3 **Indeed, against me He will again turn His hand all day.** God came back again and again to strike me relentlessly.

4 **He wore away my flesh and my skin, broke my bones.**

5 **He built against me** a wall of siege,⁴⁷ **and surrounded me with gall,**⁸ a bitter and poisonous weed,⁴⁸ **and adversity.**

6 **He settled me in darkness,** like those long dead, who dwell in eternal darkness.

7 **He fenced me in,** limited my movement, so **that I would not emerge;** He **made my fetters heavy,** so that they bind me down.⁴⁹

8 **Even as I cry and plead, He blocks my prayer,**⁵⁰ preventing it from reaching Him and being accepted.

9 **He fenced my ways with hewn stone,** stones for construction that block roads; He **distorted my paths.** Not only does He not redeem me from my troubles, but He gives me new ones.

10 **He, God, is like a bear in ambush to me, a lion in hiding.** Therefore, dangers appear in my life repeatedly.

11 **He has twisted my ways,**⁵¹ or, He has covered my ways with thorns,⁵² **and mauled me, torn me to pieces,**⁵³ **rendered me desolate** and alone.

12 **He drew His bow and set me as the target for the arrow.**

13 **He then pierced my kidneys with His arrows, the contents of His quiver.**

14 **I have become a laughingstock to all my people, their song^D all day.** I have become an object of mockery and satirical songs. The lamenter here is referring to himself, or alternatively, he is speaking of the people, in first person, as their representative.

15 **He, God, filled me with bitterness, sated me with** a solution of **wormwood,**⁸ a bitter or poisonous drink.

16 Since God has withheld food from me, **He has ground my teeth with gravel,** forcing me to eat it, and He has **covered me in ashes.**⁵⁴



Gall, hemlock



Remains of fetters, Roman period



Bear, detail from the Birds Mosaic, Caesarea, Byzantine period

17 **My soul has forsaken peace;** my soul has abandoned its hope for peace. **I have forgotten** the possibility of **goodness** because I am engulfed in distress.

18 When I saw that God was ignoring me, **I said: My eternity,** my eternal soul, **and my expectation,** my hope, **have perished,** are lost, **from the Lord.**⁵⁵

19 **Remember my affliction and my anguish,** my hardship, which is bitter like **wormwood and gall.**

20 In the future **You will remember,** and yet in the meantime, my soul **is bowed down within me** from the toil and suffering.⁵⁶

21 Despite the pain and anguish that God has wrought upon me, almost leading me to despair, **this I will reply to my heart;** I constantly remind myself of the following principle, and **therefore I will await,** or I have hope.⁵⁷

22 **It is due to the Lord's kindnesses that we have not ceased.** Thanks to the Lord's mercies we have not been utterly consumed; we still exist, despite all the troubles, **for His mercies have not ended.** This faith was expressed by the Jewish people in all of their exiles.⁵⁸

23 **New every morning, great is the trust in You.**^D Alternatively, every morning my faith in You strengthens anew.

24 **The Lord is my portion, says my soul,** choosing to be loyal to God.⁵⁹ **Therefore I will await Him.**

25 **The Lord is good to those who hope for Him, to the soul that seeks Him.**

26 **It is good for a man to await silently⁶⁰ the salvation of the Lord.**

27 The prophet further consoles himself: **It is good for a man that he bears a yoke in his youth.** Just as a young man can carry a heavy burden without getting injured, so too let him accept the challenge described in the next verse.

28 **Let him sit alone and be silent, because he took it upon himself;** he has accepted this life situation, despite its hardship.⁶¹

29 **Let him subdue himself and put his mouth in the dust,** so that he cannot speak;⁶² **perhaps there is hope.**

30 Instead of striking back, **let him offer his cheek to one who strikes him; let him be filled with disgrace,** as he is smitten from every direction.

31 Nevertheless, there is still hope, **for the Lord will not forsake forever.**

32 **For, even if He torments,** ultimately **He will have compassion, according to His abundant kindness.**⁶³

33 **For He does not afflict people willingly** for no reason, **and He does not torment the children of men** capriciously.⁶⁴



Wormwood

עֲנֵה מִלְּבֹו וַיִּגַּה בְּנִי־אִישׁ: לְדַכֵּא תַּחַת רַגְלָיו כָּל אֲסִירֵי אֶרֶץ: לְהַטּוֹת מִשְׁפָּט־
 גֹּבֶר נֶגֶד פָּנָי עָלֶיּוֹן: לְעֹנֹת אָדָם בְּרִיבֹו אֲדֹנָי לֹא רָאָה: מִי זֶה אָמַר וַתְּהִי אֲדֹנָי לֹא
 צוּה: מִפִּי עָלֶיּוֹן לֹא תֵצֵא הֲרָעוֹת וְהַטּוֹב: מִה־יִּתְאוּנֶן אָדָם חִי גֹבֶר עַל־חַטָּאוֹ:
 נַחֲפָשָׁה דִרְלִינוּ וְנַחֲקָרָה וְנִשׁוּבָה עַד־יֵהוּה: נִשָּׂא לְבַבְנוּ אֶל־כַּפָּיִם אֶל־אֵל
 בְּשָׁמַיִם: נַחֲנוּ פִשְׁעֵנוּ וּמִרְיָנוּ אַתָּה לֹא סָלַחְתָּ: סָפּוֹתָה בְּאֶף וַתִּרְדְּפֵנוּ הֲרָגְתָּ לֹא
 חֲמַלְתָּ: סָפְתָה בַּעֲנָן לֶךְ מַעֲבֹור תִּפְלָה: סָחִי וּמֵאוֹס תִּשְׁיַמְנוּ בִּקְרֹב הָעַמִּים:
 פָּצוּ עֵלְיֵנוּ פִּיהֶם כָּל־אִיבֵינוּ: פָּחַד וּפַחַת הִיָּה לָנוּ הַשָּׂאת וְהַשָּׁבֵר: פִּלְגֵי־מַיִם
 יִתְרַד עֵינָי עַל־שָׁבֵר בַּת־עַמִּי: עֵינִי נִגְרָה וְלֹא תִדְמָה מֵאִין הַפְּגוֹת: עַד־יִשְׁקִיף
 וְיֵרָא יֵהוּה מִשְׁמָיִם: עֵינִי עוֹלִלָה לְנַפְשִׁי מִכָּל בְּנוֹת עִירִי: צוֹד צָדוֹנִי כַּצֶּפֶר אִיבִי
 חֲנָם: צִמְתּוֹ בְּבוֹר חַיִּי וַיִּדּוּ־אֶבֶן בִּי: צָפוּ־מַיִם עַל־דְּאִשִּׁי אֲמַרְתִּי נִגְזַרְתִּי: קִרְאתִי
 שִׁמְךָ יֵהוּה מִבוֹר תַּחְתִּיּוֹת: קוֹלִי שָׁמַעַתְּ אֶל־תַּעֲלָם אֲזַנְךָ לִדְרוּחַתִּי לְשׁוּעַתִּי:
 קִרְבַּתְּ בַּיּוֹם אֶקְרָאֲךָ אֲמַרְתָּ אֶל־תִּירָא: רַבַּת אֲדֹנָי רִיבִי נִפְשִׁי גָּאֻלְתָּ חַיִּי:
 רְאִיתָה יֵהוּה עֹתֹתַי שְׁפָטָה מִשְׁפָּטִי: רְאִיתָה כָּל־נִקְמָתָם כָּל־מַחֲשַׁבְתָּם לִי:
 שָׁמַעַתְּ חֲרָפְתָם יֵהוּה כָּל־מַחֲשַׁבְתָּם עָלַי: שָׁפַתִּי קָמִי וְהִגִּזוּנָם עָלִי כָּל־הַיּוֹם:

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61 You heard their taunt,⁸⁵ Lord, all their thoughts about me. When Jeremiah's harsh prophecies for the future did not materialize, his listeners would ridicule him and throw stones at him. When the prophecies were eventually fulfilled, the same people took revenge against him, as though he were to blame

for the events, even though his statements had been meant merely to warn them.

62 The lips, the words, of those who rise against me, and their thoughts, are against me all day. In all their statements and thoughts, I am considered the sole guilty party.⁸⁶

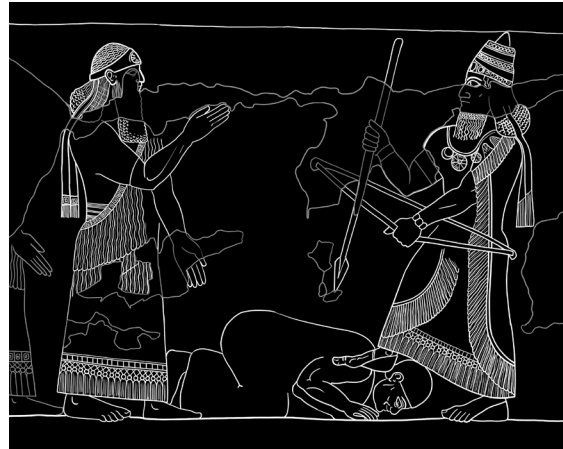
DISCUSSION

3:39| **What shall a living man complain? Each man for his sins:** King David said similarly: "Evil shall kill the wicked" (Psalms 34:22). Evil deeds are the cause of their author's misfortunes.

3:53–55| **They bound my life in the pit... waters rose over my head...from the depths of the pit:** These are not merely metaphoric expressions of confinement and humiliation; according to the book of Jeremiah (38:6), this actually happened to Jeremiah: "They took Jeremiah

and they cast him into the pit of Malkiyahu the king's son, which was in the court of internment, and they lowered Jeremiah with ropes. And in the pit there was no water but only mud, and Jeremiah was drowning in the mud."

34 He does not want⁶⁵ to subdue under His feet all the prisoners of the earth.



"To subdue under his feet." Tiglat Pileser subduing his enemy under his feet, Nimrud, Iraq, 747-727 BCE

35 And it is not His habit⁶⁶ to distort the judgment of man before the face of the Most High. God does not pervert justice, to subvert a man in his quarrel, his cause, the Lord has deemed it unfit.⁶⁷

37 Who is this, what enemy could there be, who said that he would harm Israel and it occurred, whose declaration was fulfilled, if the Lord did not command it? If Israel suffers harm, it is certainly a divine decree.⁶⁸

38 From the mouth of the Most High, evil and good do not emerge. God leaves the world in the hands of man's free will.⁶⁹

39 When all is said and done, what shall a living man complain? His complaints about his difficulties and troubles are unjustified, as each man for his sins.⁷⁰ His dire situation is merely the result of his own evil deeds.⁷⁰

40 Therefore, let us search and examine our ways, and return to the Lord.

41 Let us lift up our heart with our hands, to God in the heavens. Let us rip out our heart and give it, as it were, to God.⁷¹

42 Despite the call for appeasement and hope, notwithstanding the theodicy and logical explanations, the cry toward God reemerges: Although we have transgressed and defied, and we were therefore deserving of punishment, nevertheless, we would have expected You to pardon us, not only the way a master pardons his slaves, but as a father forgives his children.⁷² However, You have not forgiven.

43 You are covered with wrath, or: You distanced yourself and hid behind a wall of wrath,⁷³ and have pursued us; You killed; You did not have compassion.

44 You have covered Yourself, as if with a cloud, so that no prayer can pass through, as though the gates of heaven are closed to our prayers.⁷⁴ The prophet speaks here in the name of all the people of Israel.

45 You render us⁷⁵ filth and refuse in the midst of the peoples.

46 All our enemies have opened their mouth wide against us, and we cannot respond.

47 Terror and a trap, or obstacles,⁷⁶ came upon us, desolation and disaster.⁷⁷

48 The prophet returns to speaking in first person singular: When faced with our shameful state among the nations, streams of water pour down from my eye, crying for the disaster of the daughter of my people.

49 My eye will flow with tears and will not cease,⁷⁸ from lack of respite. The tears do not cease because there is no respite from our troubles.⁷⁹

50 I cry continuously, until the Lord looks out and sees our misery from the heavens, and redeems us soon. Expressions of hope, loyalty, and faith in future salvation again come to the fore.

51 My eye distressed my soul,⁸⁰ or contaminated my soul,⁸¹ more than all the daughters of my city. Alternatively: Jeremiah is lamenting over the fact that he has seen all of his neighbors and relatives going into exile or getting killed, while his own sobbing eyes are the only ones left to cry for all the rest, like an incompletely formed cluster of grapes [olelet] left on the vine during the harvest.

52 My enemies hunted me like a bird is hunted, without cause.

53 They bound my life in the pit.⁸² And furthermore, they cast stones at me.

54 The pit was full of water; waters rose over my head. I said: I am doomed. My end has come.

55 I called upon Your name, I prayed to You, Lord, from the depths of the pit.⁸³

56 You heard my voice, which is itself a minor salvation; please, let Your ear not disregard my cry, for my comfort. The prophet begs God not to ignore his plea, so that his conditions may improve.⁸³

57 I had hope when You approached on the day that I called You. You said to me: Do not fear.

58 In the end, Lord, You have fought the battles of my soul; You redeemed my life.

59 Lord, You have seen my wrongs, the injustice that was done to me;⁸⁴ please adjudicate my case.

60 You have seen all their, the enemies', vengeance, all their evil thoughts against me.



"My enemies hunted me like a bird." Hunting birds, relief, Tomb of Nebamun, Eighteenth Dynasty, Egypt

שְׁבִתָם וְקִימָתָם הַפִּיטָה אֲנִי מִנְגִּינָתָם: תִּשְׁיֵב לָהֶם גָּמוֹל יְהוָה בְּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיהֶם:
תִּתֵּן לָהֶם מִגְנֵת־לֵב תִּאלֶתֶךָ לָהֶם: תִּרְדֹּף בְּאֶף וְתִשְׁמִידִם מִתַּחַת שָׁמַי יְהוָה:
אֵיכָה יוֹעַם זֶהָב יִשְׁנֹא הִפְתָּם הַטּוֹב תִּשְׁתַּפְּכֶנָּה אֲבִנֵי־קֹדֶשׁ בְּרֹאשׁ כָּל־חֻצוֹת:
בְּנֵי צִיּוֹן הַיְקָרִים הַמְּסֻלָּאִים בָּפוּ אֵיכָה נָחֲשׁוּ לִגְבִּל־חֹרֶשׁ מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי יוֹצֵר:
גַּם־תִּנְיֹן חֲלָצוֹ שֹׂד הַיְנִיקוֹ גּוֹרִיהֶן בַּת־עַמִּי לְאַכְזֹר כִּי עֲנִים בַּמַּדְבָּר: דָּבַק לְשׁוֹן
יֹנֵק אֶל־חִפּוֹ בַּצִּמָּא עוֹלָלִים שָׁאֲלוּ לָחֶם פֶּדֶשׁ אֵין לָהֶם: הָאֲכָלִים לְמַעַדְנִים נִשְׁמוּ
בַּחֻצוֹת הָאֲמֻנִים עָלֵי תוֹלַע חִבְקוֹ אֲשַׁפְּתוֹת: וַיִּגְדֵּל עוֹן בַּת־עַמִּי מַחֲטָאת סֹדֶם
הַהִפּוּכָה כְּמוֹ־דָגַע וְלֹא־חָלוּ בָּהּ יָדַיִם: זָפוּ נְזִירֶיהָ מִשְׁלֵג צָחוּ מַחֲלָב אָדָמוּ עֵצִם
מִפְּנִינִים סָפִיר גִּזְרָתָם: חֲשַׁךְ מִשְׁחֹר תֵּאָרֶם לֹא נִכְרוּ בַּחֻצוֹת צָפַד עוֹרֶם עַל־
עֵצָם יֵבֶשׁ הָיָה כַּעֵץ: טוֹבִים הָיוּ חֲלָל־חֶרֶב מַחֲלָלִי רַעֲב שֶׁהֶם יָזְבוּ מִדְּקָרִים
מִתְּנוּבוֹת שְׂדֵי: יְדֵי נָשִׁים רַחֲמָנוֹת בִּשְׁלוּ יְלִידֵיהֶן הָיוּ לְבָרוֹת לָמוּ בִּשְׁבַר בַּת־

תַּנִּים
פִּיעֵנִים

4:3 | **Jackals [tannim] take out a breast:** According to the written text, the word is spelled *tannin*. This leads to the interpretation by some that the verse is referring to whales, which did exist in the Mediterranean Sea, though it is not their natural habitat. It may be suggested that the expression “take out a breast” supports this interpretation, as the nursing parts of the female whale are covered in pockets of skin and need to be drawn out for nursing. On the other hand, according to the traditional vocalization of the text, the word is *tannim*, the plural of *tan*, which is a jackal, an animal similar to a fox that feeds on various animals and carrion. The *tan* is mentioned in the Bible as a howling desert animal. This interpretation of the verse is supported by the comparison to the ostrich, an

other desert animal (see Isaiah 13:21–22, 34:13; 43:20). Alternatively, some identify the *tan* with the Pharaoh eagle-owl (*bubo ascalaphus*), a nocturnal bird of prey that dwells in ruins and crevices.

Like ostriches [ye’anim]: An ostrich does not have a nest; it leaves its eggs on the ground, without incubation. Perhaps for this reason it is described as cruel toward its offspring. A similar behavior is criticized in the book of Job (39:13–15): “The wing of the songbird beats joyously; are its pinions and its plumage of a stork? For it leaves its eggs on the earth and warms them on dust, and it forgets that a foot may crush it or a beast of the field trample it.” There is an opinion that the term *ye’anim* refers not to a type of

animal, but is the name of a tribe, based on one reading of Psalms 55:20 (*Tur Sinai*).

4:7 | **Gems [peninim]:** In biblical Hebrew and in the Aramaic translations of the Bible, *peninim* are specific kinds of round precious stones, or alternatively, a generic word for all precious stones. In Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Song of Songs (5:14), he interprets *peninim* to mean sapphires. However, others maintain that the term refers to pearls, which are formed in seashells from organic matter and are generally white, silver, or black. In ancient Egyptian, a similar word denotes a spherical marble, and in Akkadian, there is a similar word that refers to a precious stone that comes from the sea and perhaps means pearl or coral.

- 63 Look at their sitting and their rising, look at what they do constantly; I am the subject of their song, the object of their mockery and ridicule.
- 64 Pay them retribution, Lord, punish them, according to their handiwork.

The Destruction of the Precious Sons of Zion

LAMENTATIONS 4:1–22

siege and war. The residents of Jerusalem had placed their trust in foreign aid and had also hoped that their king would save them, but their hopes were dashed. The lamentation ends with words of comfort: Edom, which rejoices in the misfortune of Israel, will be destroyed too, and Jerusalem’s disaster will end.

- 4 1 How can shiny gold tarnish?⁸⁹ How can the appearance of the fine gold change?⁹⁰ The sacred stones are spilled at the head of every street. How is all that was beautiful and precious disgraced and gone to waste?
- 2 The precious sons of Zion, who were valued as gold,⁹¹ how are they now considered as worthless as earthenware jugs, the handiwork of the hands of the potter?
- 3 Even jackals take out a breast,^b nurse their pups. Even these animals, some of whom are predatory, are merciful in certain situations; but the daughter of my people has become cruel. The mothers of Jerusalem are malnourished; their breasts have shriveled, and their survival instincts prevent them from supplying the needs of their children.⁹² They are like ostriches,^b who abandon their offspring⁹³ in the wilderness. This is what has befallen Israel. Jerusalem has become like a wilderness, a place where people do not care for each other.



Female jackal and her offspring



“Nurse their pups,” female whale and her offspring



“Ostriches in the wilderness”

- 65 May you give them hardness of heart, troubles that seal up the heart;⁸⁷ may Your curse be upon them.⁸⁸
- 66 May you pursue them in wrath and destroy them from beneath the heavens of the Lord.

Due to its sins, Jerusalem was filled with victims, those dead of starvation and those killed by the sword. This lamentation describes the deterioration of the people of Jerusalem, from their previous stature as a refined population, to the lowest level it is possible to reach, through

- 4 The tongue of the suckling babe sticks to its palate from thirst, because there is no milk for the nursing infants; infants request bread, and no one breaks it for them, because of the siege upon Jerusalem.
- 5 The eaters of delicacies are now desolate and penniless in the streets; those reared⁹⁴ in expensive scarlet garments now embrace heaps of refuse, as they are left with nothing.
- 6 The iniquity of the daughter of my people must have exceeded the sin of Sodom, as her punishment was more severe than that of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment, and no enemy hands seized it, whereas in Jerusalem the suffering is continuous.⁹⁵
- 7 In past times, its, Jerusalem’s, nazirites used to be purer than snow, whiter than milk; their appearance⁹⁶ was ruddier than gems,^b their form a sapphire.



Sapphire



Gems

- 8 The people of Jerusalem were clean, pure, refined, and beautiful. In better times, they engaged only in matters of holiness. Now, however, their countenance is blacker than coal; they are not recognized in the streets. Their skin is shriveled on their bones;⁹⁷ it has become dry as wood.
- 9 Those killed by sword in battle were better off than those killed by hunger, for from their ruptured bodies,⁹⁸ they, the victims of hunger, leak with, emit various liquids from, the produce of the field.⁹⁹ Alternatively, “these” refers to the victims of the sword, who were stabbed through while sated.¹⁰⁰
- 10 The hands of merciful women cooked their children; they, the children, were food for them, their mothers,¹⁰¹ in the time of the disaster of the daughter of my people.

עַמִּי: כָּלָה יְהוָה אֶת־חַמְתּוֹ שֶׁפָּךְ חֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ וַיִּצֵּת־אֵשׁ בְּצִיּוֹן וַהֲאֵכַל יִסְדֹּתֶיהָ: לֹא
הָאֱמִינוּ מַלְכֵי־אֶרֶץ וְכָל יוֹשְׁבֵי תִבֵּל כִּי יבֹא צָר וְאוֹיֵב בְּשַׁעְרֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם: מִחֲטָאת
נְבִיאֶיהָ עֹזֶנֶת כְּהִנְיָה הַשֹּׁפְכִים בְּקַרְפָּה דָם צַדִּיקִים: נָעוּ עוֹרִים בְּחוֹצוֹת נִגְאָלוּ
בָּדָם בְּלֹא יוֹכְלוּ יָגֵעוּ בְּלִב־שִׁיהֶם: סוּרוּ טִמָּא קָרְאוּ לָמוּ סוּרוּ סוּרוּ אֶל־תִּגְעוּ כִּי
נָצוּ גַם־נָעוּ אָמְרוּ בַּגּוֹיִם לֹא יוֹסֵפוּ לָגוּר: פָּנֵי יְהוָה חִלָּקֶם לֹא יוֹסִיף לְהַבִּיטֶם
פָּנֵי כְהֲנִים לֹא נָשְׂאוּ זִקְנִים לֹא חָנְנוּ: עוֹדִינָה תִכְלִינָה עֵינֵינוּ אֶל־עֲזָרָתָנוּ הֶבֶל
בְּצַפִּיתָנוּ צָפִינוּ אֶל־גּוֹי לֹא יוֹשֶׁעַ: צָדּוֹ צַעֲדֵינוּ מַלְכַת בְּרַחֲבֵינוּ קָרַב קִצְנוּ
מָלְאוּ יָמֵינוּ כִּי־בָא קִצְנוּ: קָלִים הָיוּ רִדְפֵינוּ מִנִּשְׁרֵי שָׁמַיִם עַל־הַהָרִים דִּלְקָנוּ
בַּמִּדְבָּר אָרְבוּ לָנוּ: רוּחַ אֲפִינוּ מָשִׁיחַ יְהוָה נִלְכַּד בְּשַׁחֲתוֹתָם אֲשֶׁר אָמְרָנוּ בְּצִלּוֹ
נַחִיָּה בַּגּוֹיִם: שִׁישִׁי וְשִׁמְחִי בַת־אֲדוֹם יוֹשְׁבַתִי בְּאֶרֶץ עוֹץ גַּם־עָלִיךְ תִּעֲבֹר־כּוֹס
תִּשְׁכְּרִי וְתִתְעַדִּי: תָּם־עוֹנֶךָ בַת־צִיּוֹן לֹא יוֹסִיף לְהַגְלוֹתְךָ פֶּקֶד עוֹנֶךָ בַת־אֲדוֹם
גָּלָה עַל־חֲטָאתֶיךָ:

וזקנים
עודינו

יושבת

BACKGROUND

4:12| **That a besieger and enemy would enter the gates of Jerusalem:** Nebuchadnezzar’s conquest of Jerusalem and his subsequent coronation of Tzidkiya are described in a Babylonian chronicle that was discovered during excavations of the city of Babylon: “In the seventh year of the month of Kislev, the king of Akkad [Nebuchadnezzar] gathered his soldiers and went to the land of the Hitites [Syria and Israel], and encamped by the city of Judah; and in the month of Adar, on the second day [of the month], he seized the city and captured the king, appointed in it a king whom he trusted, and took a heavy tax from it, and came to Babylon.”

4:19| **Eagle [*neshar*]:** Some explain that this is the griffon vulture, *Gyps fulvus*, a large bird that nests and soars at markedly high altitudes, which enables it to glide swiftly toward its food (see Jeremiah 48:40; Obadiah 1:4; Micah 1:16; Habakkuk 1:8; Job 39:27–28). This bird was a royal symbol in both Egypt and Assyria. Its wingspan stretches to 2.5 m and it weighs roughly 10 kg. Its head and neck are bare of feathers, as though they were plucked [*nashar*]; perhaps this accounts for the name. Some identify the *neshar* with the golden eagle, *Aquila chrysaetos*, which was an important Roman symbol, while yet others maintain that *neshar* is a general term that refers to several different types of birds of prey.

4:21| **The land of Utz:** Apparently, there were several lands called Utz. In Genesis there is a son of Aram named Utz (10:23). In addition, the land of Utz appears as one of the lands of the Children of the East in the book of Job (1:3). Therefore, some place it somewhere in or near modern-day Syria. Ancient historians, e.g., Josephus Flavius, identified it as being in an area of the Bashan, now known as the Golan Heights. In addition, there was a grandson of Se’ir named Utz (Genesis 36:28), and that source and the verse here indicate that there was also a land called Utz in the Edomite region further south, in what is now Jordan.

- 11 The Lord vented His fury, He poured out His enflamed wrath. He kindled a fire in Zion, and it consumed even its foundations.
- 12 The kings of the earth and all the inhabitants of the world did not believe that a besieger and enemy would enter the gates of Jerusalem,⁸ which was such a central, fortified, and secure city.
- 13 It, this entire catastrophe, was due to the sins of her false prophets,¹⁰² and because of the iniquities of her priests, who shed the blood of the righteous in her midst, in order to achieve wealth and honor.
- 14 The entire city was filled with the blood of the dead. They wandered blind in the streets. Alternatively, blind men wander in the streets without a guide, having been sullied with blood, as they could not see where the corpses were, so that one could not touch their filthy garments.
- 15 It was necessary to warn those approaching: Turn away, impure, they called to them; turn away, turn away, do not touch, because they were begrimed, had become dirty, as well as wandering. They said among the nations: They will not continue to reside here, in our land, or in Jerusalem.¹⁰³
- 16 The attention of the Lord has divided them; God has scattered them in His anger.¹⁰⁴ He will not continue to look at them, as they did not respect priests and were not gracious to elders. They did not help the needy.¹⁰⁵
- 17 Our eyes yet fail, seeking deliverance in vain; our hopes for help have turned out to be in vain. In our waiting, we awaited a foreign nation that we hoped would come to our aid, but it cannot save us.¹⁰⁶



The conquest of Jerusalem described in “the Babylonian Chronicle,” sixth century BCE

- 18 They, the enemies, hunted our steps, even preventing us¹⁰⁷ from walking in our squares; our end approaches, our days are filled, as our end has come.
- 19 Even those who did not stay in the city could not find refuge because our pursuers were swifter than the eagles⁸ of the heavens, and they captured us. They chased us on the mountains; they ambushed us in the wilderness.
- 20 The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord,⁹ a reference to the king of Judah, who was anointed with a special oil, was captured in their traps. This is the king of whom we said: In his shade we will live among the nations.
- 21 The lamenter expresses bitter scorn toward the people of Edom, who, during this period, enjoyed calm and bliss: Be glad and rejoice, daughter of Edom,¹⁰ who resides in the land of Utz.⁸ But not for long, as the cup of vengeance and destruction will pass to you too; you will get drunk from drinking it, and you will be overturned, ruined.¹⁰⁸



Possible locations for the land of Utz

- 22 Your iniquity is completed, daughter of Zion; He, God, will not continue to exile you. You have received the entire punishment that you deserved and have consequently paid for all your sins. On the other hand, He reckons your iniquity, daughter of Edom; He will expose your sins. He will yet settle His account with you for your sins.

DISCUSSION

4:20| **The anointed of the Lord:** The Sages identified this king as Yoshiya, the last great king of Judah, upon whom Israel placed their final hope for defense. This hope ended in disappointment when Yoshiya was shot dead by the Egyptian army (II Chronicles 35:23; *Tosefta*, *Ta’anit* 2:10; see introduction to this lamentation).

4:21| **Edom:** The people of Edom supported Judah’s enemies and mocked the inhabitants of Jerusalem during their destruction (see Obadiah 1:12–14). The final word of this verse is the rare verb *titari*, used by the prophet to prophesy the destruction of Edom. It literally means “you shall make yourself naked”; its implied meaning is

that Israel will be overturned, torn down, and ruined. It paraphrases Edom’s joyous exclamation when they celebrated Israel’s defeat, encouraging their total destruction (Psalms 137:7): “Tear it down [*aru*], tear it down [*aru*], until its very foundation.”

ה זְכוֹר יְהוָה מִה־הָיָה לָנוּ הִבֵּיט וּרְאֵה אֶת־חַרְפֹּתֵינוּ: נִחַלְתָּנוּ נִהַפְכָה לְזָדִים בְּתֵינוּ
 ב לְנֹכְדִים: יְתוּמִים הָיִינוּ אֵין אָב אִמֹּתֵינוּ כְּאֶלְמָנוֹת: מִיָּמֵינוּ בְּכֶסֶף שְׂתֵינוּ עֵצֵינוּ
 ה בְּמַחִיר יִבָּאוּ: עַל צוּאֲרֵנוּ נִרְדָּפְנוּ יִגְעֲנוּ לֹא הוֹנַח־לָנוּ: מִצָּרִים נָתַנוּ יָד אֲשׁוּר
 ו לְשִׁבְעַ לֶחֶם: אֲבֹתֵינוּ חָטְאוּ אִינָם אֲנַחְנוּ עֲוֹנְתִיהֶם סָבְלָנוּ: עֲבָדִים מָשְׁלוּ בָנוּ
 ח פָּדָק אֵין מִיָּדָם: בְּנִפְשֵׁנוּ נָבִיא לַחֲמֵנוּ מִפְּנֵי חֶרֶב הַמִּדְבָּר: עוֹרָנוּ כְּתָנוּר נִכְמְרוּ
 ט מִפְּנֵי זִלְעָפוֹת רָעָב: נָשִׁים בְּצִיּוֹן עָנּוּ בַתְּלַת בְּעָרֵי יְהוּדָה: שָׂדִים בְּיָדָם נִתְּלוּ
 יב פָּנֵי זִקְנִים לֹא נִהְדָּרוּ: בַּחוּדִים טָחוּן נָשְׂאוּ וְנִעָרִים בָּעֵץ כָּשְׁלוּ: זִקְנִים מִשְׁעַר
 יד שְׁכָתוֹ בַּחוּדִים מְנַגִּינָתָם: שָׁבַת מְשׁוֹשׁ לִבָּנוּ נִהַפְךְ לְאָבֵל מַחוּלָנוּ: נִפְּלָה עֲטוּתָהּ
 טו רֹאשֵׁנוּ אוֹי־נָא לָנוּ כִּי חָטְאֵנוּ: עַל־זֶה הָיָה דָּוָה לִבָּנוּ עַל־אַלֶּה חָשְׁכוּ עֵינֵינוּ:
 יז עַל הִר־צִיּוֹן שְׁשָׁמָם שׁוֹעֲלִים הִלְכוּ־בוּ: אֶתְּהָ יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם תִּשָּׁב כְּסֹאֲךָ לְדוֹר
 יט וְדוֹר: לִמָּה לִנְצַח תִּשְׁכַּחְנוּ תַעֲזֹבְנוּ לְאֹדֶךְ יָמִים: הִשִּׁיבְנוּ יְהוָה וְ אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְנָשׁוּבָה
 כא חֲדָשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֹדֶם: כִּי אִם־מָאֵס מְאֹסְתָנוּ קִצְפָּת עָלֵינוּ עַד־מָאֹד:
 כב

השיבנו יהוה אליך ונשובה חדש ימינו כקדם

Humiliation, Orphanhood, and Eternal Hope

LAMENTATIONS 5:1–22

This lamentation is different from the others in that it is not an alphabetical acrostic. But it is similar to most of them in that it has twenty-two verses, and in addition, like the previous lamentations, the suffering and troubles of the people of Jerusalem are described. Toward the end, the lamenter focuses his anguish on the destruction of Mount Zion, the source of his heartache. However, he emphasizes that although God's dwelling place in the world has been destroyed, He still remains. This provides hope for the restoration of the relationship and the covenant between God and His people.

- 5 **1 Remember, Lord, what befell us**, our terrible troubles. Alternatively, this means: Remember our glorious past, and on the other hand, **look and see our current disgrace**.¹⁰⁹
- 2 Our inheritance has been transferred to strangers**, after they invaded and plundered it, **our houses** have been given to foreigners.
- 3 We have become orphans, fatherless; our mothers are like widows**.¹¹⁰
- 4** When the water reservoirs were full, there was no need to pay for water;¹¹¹ but during the siege, **our water we drank for money**. In better days, there was no shortage of wood that could be collected easily; now, **our wood comes at a price**.
- 5 Up to our necks we were pursued; we are exhausted, and we have no respite**.
- 6 We extended a hand to Egypt**, to receive financial aid from them. This may be referring to Tzidkiya's covenant with Egypt.¹¹² And we went to **Assyria, to be sated with bread**; but help came from neither kingdom.¹¹³
- 7 Our fathers have sinned and are no more, and we have suffered** not only for our own sins, but for **their iniquities** as well.
- 8 Servants rule over us**. The true kingdom has fallen, and as naturally happens when the government is weak, people from the bottom of society have risen to greatness. **There is none to deliver us from their hand**.
- 9 We bring our bread at the peril of our lives due to the sword of the wilderness**. In order to obtain food, we must put our lives at risk by traveling through the desert, which is frequented by robbers.¹¹⁴ Alternatively: In order to survive during the war we must bring food from faraway places, even from the wilderness.
- 10 Our skin burns like an oven**,¹¹⁵ or has shriveled as though it were baked in an oven,¹¹⁶ **due to fear of famine**.
- 11** When the enemy soldiers invaded the city, **they raped women in Zion, virgins in the cities of Judah**.
- 12 Princes were hanged by their hand**. The enemies would hang the dignitaries of Jerusalem by their hands as a punishment, for show, or in order to extract information from them. **The faces of elders were not shown deference**. No one honored the elders.
- 13 The young, strong men carried the mill; they were ordered to carry the mill on their shoulders so that this would wear them out**.¹¹⁷ **And the lads**, who were chained, **stumbled on the wood** to which they were chained.¹¹⁸
- 14 The elders have ceased from sitting at the city gate**, as there is no longer anyone to listen to them. **The young men have ceased from their music and parties**.
- 15 The gladness of our heart has ceased; our joyous dance has been transformed into mourning**.
- 16 The crown has fallen from our head**; our honor is lost. Alternatively, this may refer to the crown and honor of the monarchy. **Woe to us, for we have sinned**.
- 17 For this our heart suffers; for these our eyes are dim**:
- 18 for Mount Zion**,^d the Temple Mount, **which is desolate**; its past vitality is gone, and **foxes**, who commonly dwell in desolate areas, **walk on it**.
- 19** Despite the anguish, the book ends on a note of acceptance and hope: **You, Lord, are enthroned forever; Your throne is secure from generation to generation**. Although God's residency in this world is the mountain of Zion, which is now desolate, His heavenly throne is independent of worldly events, and it will stand forever.¹¹⁹
- 20** But as for us, **why do You forget us forever, forsake us for the length of our days?**
- 21 Return us to You, Lord, and if You do so, we will return**; we will return to You, willingly and actively. **Renew our days as of old**, like the days when You loved us and honored us.
- 22 For You have despised us**, or: You have indeed despised us. **You have been exceedingly angry with us**. We have suffered more than enough humiliation; our debt has been paid.



"Princes were hanged by their hand."
Men of Judah hanged, Lakhish reliefs, Nineveh, 701 BCE

DISCUSSION

5:18 | **Mount Zion**: In the book of Isaiah, the Temple Mount is commonly referred to as the mountain of Zion.

5:22 | **Renew our days as of old**: There are several books in the Bible that conclude on a negative note, and the custom is to repeat the second

to last verse, which has a more optimistic tone, in order to finish the book with a positive message (see the final verses of Isaiah, Malachi, and Ecclesiastes). In the context of Lamentations, ending the book with this verse is an expression of the hope to renew Israel's relationship with

God and restore it to its state at the beginning of the people's history. A similar aspiration appears in Malachi (3:4): "Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant to the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in ancient years." This verse is recited at the end of the *Amida* prayer.

The penultimate verse is repeated in a communal recitation:

Return us to You, Lord, and we will return; renew our days as of old.^d

Introduction

1. *Bava Batra* 15a.

2. See *Moed Katan* 26a; *Menahot* 30a and Rashi ad loc.; Abravanel, Jeremiah 36:4; *Da'at Mikra* on Daniel, summary to chapter 1.
3. II Chronicles 35:25.

4. See Rashi, Lamentations 1:1; *Moed Katan* 26a; *Eikha Rabba* 1:53; Abravanel, Jeremiah 36:2; commentary on 4:20.

Lamentations

5. Ibn Ezra.

6. See Rashi.

7. See Rashi; Ibn Ezra.

8. See Rashi.

9. Rashi.

10. See *Targum Yonatan*; Rashi.

11. *Targum Yonatan*.

12. Rashi.

13. Deuteronomy 23:4.

14. *Targum Yonatan*; Rashi; *Yevamot* 16b.

15. *Targum Yonatan*.

16. *Pesikta Zutreta*; Rav Yosef Kara.

17. *Targum Yonatan*; Ibn Ezra.

18. Rashi.

19. Rashi; Ibn Ezra.

20. See *Targum Yonatan*; Leviticus 20:18.

21. See Rashi.

22. Rashi; Ibn Ezra.

23. See Ibn Ezra.

24. Rashi.

25. Bekhor Shor.

26. Rashi.

27. See *Targum Yonatan*; Rashi.

28. See Ibn Ezra, Job 16:16.

29. Rashi; Ibn Ezra.

30. *Targum Yonatan*; Rashi; see Psalms 132:7; I Chronicles 28:2; commentary on Exodus 24:9.

31. *Targum Yonatan*; Rashi.

32. *Targum Yonatan*; Rashi.

33. See Rashi.

34. *Targum Yonatan*.

35. Rashi; see Rav Yosef Kara, Ezekiel 22:26.

36. Rashi.

37. See Psalms 42:5.

38. *Targum Yonatan*.

39. See Ibn Ezra, Job 16:16.

40. See Rashi; *Pesikta Zutreta*.

41. Ibn Ezra.

42. See *Pesikta Zutreta*.
43. *Targum Yonatan*.

44. *Pesikta Zutreta*.

45. See Rashi.

46. Rashi.

47. Bekhor Shor.

48. See Rashi.

49. *Targum Yonatan*; Rashi.

50. Rashi.

51. Rav Yosef Caspi.

52. Rashi.

53. *Targum Yonatan*.

54. See *Targum Yonatan*; Rashi.

55. Alsheikh.

56. See *Pesikta Zutreta*; Rashi.

57. See Rashi; Ibn Ezra.

58. See *Pesikta Zutreta*.

59. *Pesikta Zutreta*.

60. *Targum Yonatan*; Rashi.

61. See Ibn Ezra.

62. See *Targum Yonatan*; Ibn Ezra.

63. *Targum Yonatan*.

64. See *Pesikta Zutreta*; Rashi.

65. Rashi.

66. *Pesikta Zutreta*.

67. See Rashi.

68. See *Pesikta Zutreta*.

69. See Rashi.

70. See *Eikha Rabba* 3:13.

71. See Rashi.

72. Rashi.

73. *Targum Yonatan*; Rashi.

74. *Targum Yonatan*.

75. Rashi.

76. Rashi.

77. Ibn Ezra.

78. *Targum Yonatan*.

79. Alsheikh.

80. Ibn Ezra; Rav Yosef Caspi.

81. See Rashi.
82. Rashi.

83. See Ibn Ezra.

84. Ibn Ezra.

85. See *Pesikta Zutreta*.

86. Alsheikh.

87. Rashi.

88. Ibn Ezra.

89. *Targum Yonatan*; Rashi.

90. *Targum Yonatan*; Rashi.

91. Rashi; Rav Yeshaya of Trani.

92. Rashi.

93. Rav Yosef Kara; Bekhor Shor.

94. *Pesikta Zutreta*; Rashi.

95. See Rashi.

96. Rashi.

97. See *Targum Yonatan*; *Pesikta Zutreta*.

98. Rashi.

99. See *Pesikta Zutreta*; Rashi.

100. Ibn Ezra.

101. Rashi.

102. Rashi.

103. See Rashi; *Pesikta Zutreta*; Rav Yosef Caspi.

104. *Targum Yonatan*; Rashi.

105. See Rashi; *Pesikta Zutreta*.

106. See Rashi.

107. Rashi.

108. See *Pesikta Zutreta*.

109. Alsheikh.

110. See commentary on 1:1.

111. See Isaiah 55:1.

112. See Ezekiel 17:18.

113. See *Targum Yonatan*; Rashi.

114. *Targum Yonatan*; Rashi.

115. Rashi.

116. See *Pesikta Zutreta*.

117. Rashi.

118. See *Pesikta Zutreta*.

119. See *Targum Yonatan*; Bekhor Shor.

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