Lamentations 1-3

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Summary

This work is the product of a textual immersion in the book of Lamentations. My engagement with the text was carried out both through chavrutah work and individual study. The goal of this text immersion was to consider Lamentations from a literary point of view, in addition to considering its theological and philosophical implications. The medium for accomplishing this goal, was the creation of an annotated translation. Translation work forced close reading, attentiveness to the literary and religious concerns of the work. Annotating the translation ensured that the learning and insights gained were explicitly articulated and retained.

I worked directly with the primary biblical text. I used dictionaries, and concordances to create my own rendering of each verse. After I had my own translation, I turned to other translations, including those with commentary – Adele Berlin's and Dilbert Hillers' in particular – in order to help sharpen my translation, find parallel sources and gain new insights. Dr. Andrea Weiss's feedback provided an invaluable final step. Her comments on my drafts pushed me towards greater clarity, pointed me in the direction of new sources, and ensured a high academic standard. I am profoundly grateful to her for her insights and for her great investment of time and energy.

I hope that my translation and annotations will further understanding of this powerful text.

Introduction

After my BA I spent a decade immersing myself in rabbinic texts, both in structured, informal settings (Pardes Institute, The Hartman Institute) and in graduate school in a PhD program at NYU. This study afforded me many encounters with Tanakh, but these encounters primarily filtered it through the rabbinic lens. I encountered verses throughout Tanakh as they were referenced in the talmudic *sugyot* and *midrashim* that I studied. Good methodology for the study of such texts meant that I expanded to look beyond the few words excerpted, to look at full verses and sometimes full chapters in Tanakh. Nonetheless, the biblical texts were always secondary. Consequently, I looked to rabbinical school as an opportunity for in-depth engagement with biblical texts. When it came time to decide on a focus for the text immersion project, I knew that I wanted to work with a biblical text.

The biblical corpus is vast, so two factors helped to further focus the textual selection. The first factor in selecting a text for immersion was my ongoing struggle with God. I grew up with a Judaism that was deeply spiritual but decidedly non-supernatural. I find "God language" alienating. The idea of a literal being whom we might name "God" does not resonate with me. Dr. Weiss directed me to Lamentations as a work that has a decidedly non-traditional view of God. In the wake of catastrophic tragedy and national suffering, Lamentations questions the possibility of a just God or even a benevolent God. In Lamentations I would not find any of the more traditional images of God, found in the Hebrew Bible, of the sort I had found alienating in the past. I hoped that I would find a model or image of God that would indeed resonate with me.

The second factor in determining an appropriate text was an interest in pastoral care. Prior to rabbinical school I spent a decade working in a congregation as an education director. This congregational work afforded me many of the organizational, service-leading, programming, and communal leadership experiences I felt I would need as a rabbi. I did not have many opportunities for pastoral care experiences or training. I was therefore interested in working with a biblical text that would have a pastoral dimension and a pastoral application.

A final concern, far lesser than the other two, was a desire to gain mastery of a certain body of material. I also sought the opportunity to work with the entirety of one discrete corpus of material, one book of the Bible.

For the text immersion project, I have written an annotated translation of the first three chapters of the book of Lamentations. As a poetic text and one of the later biblical texts, the language is often difficult. Careful and attentive reading resulted in working at a slower pace. While this meant that I did not cover as much ground as I would have liked, I derived great benefit from the slow pace. This allowed me to truly grappled with the text. I gained a deep appreciation for the artistry of biblical poetry, and I developed a much stronger facility for understanding the unique characteristics and dynamics of this literary genre. Working so closely with the text also forced me to see the tacit assumptions and deep questions at play. Lamentations is not explicitly a work of philosophy, however, there are powerful philosophical and existential questions undergirding the author's lament.

Creating my own translation forced me to make decisions at every step to ensure my translation remained faithful to Lamentations' language and message. I struggled

with questions of translation and consequently essential questions of textual engagement. I had to decide how to prioritize such issues as fidelity to Hebrew, preserving poetic structure, and conveying meaning. I struggled with how to find the right balance between focus on the micro versus the macro. In other words, I often got caught up in translating each verse individually, filtering out the surrounding material. Then, when I re-read my translation, I would see larger patterns spanning several verses that would force me to reconsider parts of my translation. Ultimately, I did not develop a precise method for adjudicating between all these translation concerns. In the end, I experienced firsthand the truism that translation is an art, not a science.

The concordance work involved in this project added an unexpected dimension of biblical encounter. Striving to understand particular words, phrases, and images led me to parallel biblical sources. I was also struck by the workings of intra-textual biblical commentary. This phenomenon manifested in many different ways. These included an extended dialogue with the book of Psalms in Lamentations 3, and internal commentary within Lamentations itself as lexical choices led to one verse in Lamentations commenting on another. I benefited from encountering the parallel sources in their original contexts and from seeing through the lens of the interconnectedness of the Tanakh as a whole.

In the course of this in-depth study of Lamentations, I was surprised by how much it brought the tragedy of the destruction of the First Temple to life. I had learned about the Babylonian conquest and destruction of the Temple countless times since childhood. I had become inured to it as just another step in the lachrymose view of

history. Lamentations conveys an intimate view of the destruction. The suffering is personalized. The point of view is intimate. The sense of shock, pain, and injustice is all consuming. The questions of such suffering existing in the world and the consequent implications about a benevolent deity are real. Time and again, I was moved by the vivid imagery. I was moved by the suffering of my forebears, over two millennia removed, yet still so painfully real. Studying this text as events such as the slaughter in Syria and fall of Aleppo unfolded brought a painful relevance to these ancient words.

As I look ahead to the future, I hope to reflect further on the "God question" which was a factor in choosing Lamentations. God plays such a prominent, seemingly literal, role in the work. The author addresses God directly and blames God for the tragedy. Relating to God as such a literal being in this way does not resonate with my experience of the divine. However, I do think that it is possible to read the text more skeptically. Instead of reading the author's challenges to God as direct addresses to God, I can read them as an implicit questioning of God's very existence. I can read the devastating inhumanity of the suffering in Lamentations as a challenge to God's existence or at least to God's direct involvement in the world.

In my rabbinate, I am interested in creating spaces that are not just joyous and celebratory, but where we can share our hard time, even our experiences of pain brokenness. Lamentations is an excellent tool for opening up such spaces. Whether it is teaching Lamentations or using quotes from it in the context of the service, it is a resource that can bring just such a voice into our communities. Also, as I head into

the pastoral work of tending to people dealing with death, sickness, or suffering of other kinds, the words of the book can help give voice to their pain.

I hope to teach this material at some point. One idea is to teach it from a personal spiritual perspective. In the fall I took a course on the book of Job. As part of a final project, I proposed a curriculum based on Job which combined text study and personal sharing. I hope to teach that curriculum at some point in the near future and would certainly add texts from Lamentations to the syllabus.

Finally, I hope to finish working with the final two chapters. While I do not imagine writing translations for those chapters, I aim to engage in serious study of the remainder of the book. Where ever I find a pulpit, I will look for a chavrutah in order to do so. Such partnership would help me not just finish my study, it would also help me accomplish the other goals mentioned above.

Ultimately the initimacy of chavrutah is a good ending place for reflection on Lamentations. Lamentations is a work borne of suffering, and suffering is something which we all too often bear on our own. The world of Lamentations, the realm of suffering, is a solitary one. This book is filled with reminders that we cannot make suffering go away. However, if we acknowledge pain, hopefully we can find a way to ease it. In my rabbinate I hope to find ways to help people acknowledge pain and ease it by providing presence, helping them to not feel so alone. Using my knowledge of Lamentations to do such work would truly be a blessing.

Lamentations 1

1. Alas![1] Alone sits the city![2]

   Once great with people -

   she has become like a widow,

   once great among the nations,

   once a queen among the provinces -

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[1] In Hebrew there is a poetic doubling to the meaning of "אֵיכָה". It operates as both a declaration of grief – "Alas!" or "Woe!" – and as a question – "how?" There are therefore two equally valid translations. In addition to the translation above, it can also be read as a question, "How alone sits the city . . .?"

[2]I will note here a structure which runs through vv. 1-6 and therefore effects my translation throughout. Each verse opens with a declaratory clause which is not unrelated to what comes next. In fact, in some cases, the first clause is closely enough related that the second clause could be interpreted as flowing directly from it. However, the stronger relationship (often causal in nature) is between the second and third clauses. I would characterize it as:

A!

B, therefore -

C

she has become a vassal.[3]

[3] This description works on two level to capture the profoundly sad state of Jerusalem and its denizens. HALOT defines this word as “compulsory labor, obligatory service.” Such compulsory service was a sign of subjugation on the part of conquering nations. This is found in Is. 31:8 "וְנָסַל אַשּׁוּר בְּחֶרֶב לֹא-אִישׁ. . .וְנָס לוֹ מִפְּנֵי-חֶרֶב, וּבַחוּרָיו לָמַס יִהְיוּ" and in 1 K 9:20-21:

"כָּל-הָעָם הַנּוֹתָר מִן-הָאֱמֹרִי הַחִתִּי הַפְּרִזִּי, הַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי, אֲשֶׁר לֹא-מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, הֵמָּה: בְּנֵיהֶם, אֲשֶׁר נֹתְרוּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם בָּאָרֶץ. . . וַיַּעֲלֵם שְׁלֹמֹה לָמַס-עֹבֵד, עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה"

This compulsory labor was also a kind of “tax” put upon a nation by their king. A highly prominent example of the מַס placed by a king upon his nation in Tanakh, is that of Solomon. Compulsory labor was key to building the Holy Temple. The word "מַס" is used four times in the context of building the temple, three of them in the span of two verses, 1K 5:27-28: "וַיַּעַל הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה מַס, מִכָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל; וַיְהִי הַמַּס, שְׁלֹשִׁים אֶלֶף אִישׁ וַיִּשְׁלָחֵם לְבָנוֹנָה, עֲשֶׂרֶת אֲלָפִים בַּחֹדֶשׁ חֲלִיפוֹת. . . וַאֲדֹנִירָם עַל-הַמַּס" This one description, ״מַס,״ captures the image of the city as defeated, subjugated. As if this were not sufficiently degrading, the word also evokes the building of the most prized structure in the city, the Temple. That temple which is now a ruin.

I chose the word “vassal’ for poetic and semantic reasons. Vassal preserves the prosody of the one Hebrew word used, in contrast to “compulsory labor.” The word also has the benefit of applying equally to a subjugated individual and a political entity (city, state, etc.) while also bearing connotations of servitude.

2. She bitterly weeps at night
   her cheeks[4] wet with tears –
   she has none[5] to comfort her
   from among all lovers,
   all of her friends have betrayed her,
   they have become her enemies.

3. Judah has gone into exile
   in suffering and hard labor –
   she sits[6] among the nations,

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[4] By gendering the city as female, the sound of the f.s.poss. suffix recurs. This leads to a constant open-mouthed "ah" sound. That is, many words end with *kamatz* followed by *heh+mapik*, or even stronger, in the case of the the f.s.poss. for a plural noun, *segol – kamatz – heh+mapik.* As a result, this sound which is reminiscent of the staccato breath of a person sobbing, recurs throughout the chapter. An audial lament mirroring the poetic, textual one.

[5] "None" is used in order to highlight the parallelism between *ein* and *kol.* The category of supports is empty – *ein*. The category of betrayal, enemies – is total, complete – *kol.*

[6] Often translated as some variation of "dwells" **(**Berlin, Hillers – "dwelt," NOAB "lives") I have chosen "sits" in order to highlight the dynamic tension in the verse. This tension stems from the ironic wordplay between "יָשְׁבָה" and "לֹא מָצְאָה מָנוֹחַ". The initial verb, יָשְׁבָה, conjures an image of sitting, being at rest, yet it is undermined by the second

yet she finds no rest,

all those who pursue her

have overtaken[7] her in the the narrow straits.[8]-

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image – an utter lack of rest. The same verb, יָשְׁבָה is also used in 1:1, "אֵיכָה יָשְׁבָה בָדָד". Translating the word the same way in both places helps to highlight this connection. This shared usage underscores the fact that though Judah, as described here sits among the nations, she is still alone, as described in 1:1.

[7] The combination of the roots רדפ and נשג is a common one. Yet, their use together in this verse, particularly accompanying *metzarim* (see note below) is an allusion to Zedekiah's flight from the fallen city of Jersualem and his subsequent capture on the plains of Jericho . This narrative is retold with the same verb combination in 2 Kings 25:5, Jeremiah 39:5, and 52:8.

[8] The word choice of מְצָרִים serves two purposes. First, as Berlin notes (p.51) there is wordplay with *mitrzayim/mitzrim* which suggests an allusion to and comparison with the suffering of the slaves in Egypt. The similarity between the words alone is not sufficient to indicate a textual allusion. However, מְצָרִים coupled with two other words in the verse prominently used to describe bondage in Egypt, עֹנִי and עֲבֹדָה, all serve as a clear allusion to slavery. The latter two words are used to describe slavery in Egypt in Gen 15:13, Ex. 1:11-13.While we find all three words together in Deut 26:6 ;"וַיָּרֵעוּ אֹתָנוּ הַמִּצְרִים, וַיְעַנּוּנוּ, וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ, עֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה"

Second, the word choice serves as a commentary on Zedekiah's flight and capture described in 2Kings 25:5 (and in nearly identical language in Jer 39:5 and 52: 8), "וַיִּרְדְּפוּ

4. The ways of Zion[9] are mourning,

   empty of festival pilgrims –

   Her gates are all desolate,

   her priests are groaning,

   her maidens afflicted -

   and so[10]she –[11] it is bitter for her.

חֵיל-כַּשְׂדִּים אַחַר הַמֶּלֶךְ, וַיַּשִּׂגוּ אֹתוֹ בְּעַרְבוֹת יְרֵחוֹ". He is captured on the plains of Jericho, decidedly NOT a narrow place, so clearly the description מְצָרִים is not meant literally. Rather, it serves as an internal commentary on that story. Though Zedekiah was caught on the plains, a wide open space, he was metaphorically in narrow straights in the sense that it is used in Ps. 118:5,"מִן-הַמֵּצַר, קָרָאתִי יָהּ"

[9] The phrase "דַּרְכֵי צִיּוֹן" has a double meaning. It conveys both the concrete sense of a physical route for traveling and the metaphorical sense of a way of life. With the temple's destruction the physical devastation is catastrophic, but even worse, a way of life – the temple cult and all that goes with it – is also gone.

[10] There is a litany of ruin that builds through the third, fourth, and fifth cola and culminates in the sixth and final colon. Each of the third through fifth cola opens with a noun ending in a 3rd f.s. poss. suffix. The final colon opens with a conjunctive *vav*. This colon conveys the effects upon Zion of the litany described in cola three through five. I have therefore rendered the *vav* more expansively than simply "and," translating it as

5. Her foes have become the chief,
   her enemies rest easy –
   since[12] YHWH afflicted her
   on account of her many transgressions,
   her young have gone away as captives[13]

"and so" to denote the causal relationship between this colon and those immediately preceding.

[11] JPS, Hillers, and NOAB all translate this colon using either "she" or "her" but not both. (e.g., JPS "she is utterly disconsolate"). I follow Berlin, as the translation represents the Hebrew more closely.

[12] I read "כי" as cast forward, expressing the causal relationship between this clause and the one the follows. Also as noted in n.2, the genius of the poetry here is that "כי" could be read as explaining the first clause as well, but it fits more tightly with the third clause.

[13] Berlin points out (p.52) common lexical elements and shared descriptions of suffering between this verse and Deut. 28. This commonality suggests that the suffering surrounding the destruction, was seen, at least partially, as the fulfillment of curses articulated in Deut. 28. The transgressing Israelites will be cursed by having strangers lead them in Deut. 28:43-44, " הַגֵּר אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ, יַעֲלֶה עָלֶיךָ מַעְלָה מָעְלָה; וְאַתָּה תֵרֵד, מַטָּה מָּטָה . . . הוּא יִהְיֶה לְרֹאשׁ, וְאַתָּה תִּהְיֶה לְזָנָב" Those who sin are also threatened with losing their children as they are taken captive in Deut 28:41 "בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת, תּוֹלִיד; וְלֹא-יִהְיוּ לָךְ, כִּי יֵלְכוּ בַּשֶּׁבִי".

before[14] the enemy.

6. Gone from Dear Zion is all her splendor –
   her chiefs are like stags
   who have not found pasture,
   and so they go[15] on
   without strength,
   before the pursuer.[16]

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[14] Ironic inversion of the beginning of the verse. Just as in the beginning of the verse where the foe is literally "the head" (the master) the children are at the head too, they are in front of enemy. Except that they are at the head, in front not as leaders, but being driven as captives, from behind.c.

[15] They *vav* of *vayelchu* can double as a conversive *vav* and as a connector with what came immediately before in the text. I am therefore using it to reflect the direct causal relationship in the parts of this simile. The stags cannot find pasture, therefore they are "without strength" before the pursuer.

[16] A motif repeated from v.5, both end with the image "_____ + לפני". In both verses, the denizens of Jerusalem are being driven from behind. The parallel structure of this phrase draws a poetic and semantic parallel between the phrase in this verse and v. 5. Through this parallelism, the enemy identified in v. 5 ("לְפָנֵי-צָר") is further described in this verse as "a pursuer" ("לִפְנֵי רוֹדֵף") as well.

7. [17]Jerusalem remembered[18] – in[19] her days of misery and oppression[20]–
   all her treasures which she had from days of old.

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[17] Verses 7-11 are a distinct unit within chapter 1 that constitute a kind a reverie. This reverie could be entitled " Jerusalem remembered," as it is initiated by that very act of retrospection. An indication that these verses are connected are the through-lines of sight and witnessing. An interesting facet of this unit is that each verse in it is followed by a verse in which a different figure is associated with ראה.

v. 7 – צרים

v. 8 – מבכדיה

v. 9 – YHWH (she calls out to YHWH, "See!")

v. 10 – Jerusalem

v. 11 – YHWH (she calls out to YHWH, "See!")

[18] The first of several examples of temporal and spatial subversion or inversion – in this case the subversion is temporal. The image of remembering leads to an expectation that what will follow is a memory, something from the past. Instead what follows is Jerusalem's present-day state, subverting expectation. Trying to follow the thread of the text, one is disoriented, reflective of the upside-down reality of Lamentations. A still more pronounced example of temporal inversion can be found in v.9.

[19] While there is no preposition in the Hebrew to indicate "in," the verse is difficult without it, so I add it, following the suggestion of a number of translations.

[20] A rare word, "מְרוּדֶיהָ" appears only here, Is. 58:7, and Lam. 3:19. In both of those other instances it is paired with some form of the word עני, so the two words seem to be a set

As her people fell into the enemy's hand

with none to help her,

the enemies saw her;

they laughed at her collapse.[21]

8. Jerusalem[22] sinned grievously,

therefore she has become a mockery,[23]

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phrasal pair. Its use in Isaiah is particularly helpful as in that context the word is clearly describing someone who is destitute, homeless, and rejected by all. The word captures that sense of being rejected by all, or at least having no one to look to for help. Berlin notes (p.46) that this word may stem from either the root מרד or רדה. The latter option is preferred. The sense of that root, connected to being dominated better suits the overall meaning of the verse than the former root, which is associated with rebellion.

[21] A hapax legomenon, it seems to derive from the root שבת and HALOT defines it as "cessation". "Collapse" used by both Berlin and Hillers fits weill here.

[22] A similar structure of "verb + Jerusalem" opens this verse and V.8. Maintaining this verb-first Hebrew syntax would be awkward in English. In order to capture this shared structure, both verses are rendered with "Jersualem + verb" to explicitly draw the connection between these two verses.

[23] This is a difficult word, since, according to HALOT, the root נוד can indicate banishment or derision. Either meaning would fit as a consequence of Jerusalem's

all who respected her treat her as worthless

for they saw her nakedness,[24]

she herself groans

and turns away.

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grievous sinning. Based on what follows in the verse, and the theme of the surrounding verses, Jerusalem's debasement, I have opted to connect it to derision.

[24] Beyond the basic, literal level of shame associated with the exposure of physical nakedness, the mention of her nakedness operates on two symbolic levels. First, the exposing of her nakedness is reminiscent of the familiar trope of Israel's wanton, inappropriate sexuality, either due to idolatry as in Jer. 13:27, "נַאֲפַיִךְ וּמְצַהֲלוֹתַיִךְ, זִמַּת זְנוּתֵךְ עַל-גְּבָעוֹת בַּשָּׂדֶה, רָאִיתִי שִׁקּוּצַיִךְ; אוֹי לָךְ, יְרוּשָׁלִַם--לֹא תִטְהָרִי, אַחֲרֵי מָתַי עֹד" or due to foreign alliances as we find in Ezekiel 16. Both descriptions are accompanied by the revealing of nakedness, found in Ez. 16:37

לָכֵן הִנְנִי מְקַבֵּץ אֶת-כָּל-מְאַהֲבַיִךְ, אֲשֶׁר עָרַבְתְּ עֲלֵיהֶם וְאֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר אָהַבְתְּ, עַל כָּל-אֲשֶׁר שָׂנֵאת;

וְקִבַּצְתִּי אֹתָם עָלַיִךְ מִסָּבִיב, וְגִלֵּיתִי עֶרְוָתֵךְ אֲלֵהֶם, וְרָאוּ אֶת-כָּל-עֶרְוָתֵךְ

A similar description is found in Jer. 13:26. Furthermore, ערוה is defined by HALOT as "nakedness, genital area." Thus, to say that someone saw "עֶרְוָתָהּ" , may be a veiled reference to them seeing another forbidden, extremely private area, namely, the "Holy of Holies." In this way, "כִּי-רָאוּ עֶרְוָתָהּ" can be read as a reference to foreigners seeing, even entering that place which they were not meant to enter (Cf., v. 10). Both of these readings are carried through in the next two verses.

9. Her impurity[25] is on her skirts[26],
   she took no thought of the consequences[27]
   and she has sunk down spectacularly[28];
   there is none to comfort her, [29]
   "See my misery, O YHWH,
   for the enemy is triumphant."

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[25] Following Berlin (pp.54-55) I see the reference to impurity as a continuation of the theme of sexual impropriety and violation.

[26] As was mentioned in the notes on the previous verse, the likening of the sinning people to a liscnetious women lifting up her skirts in a recurring trope, found in Jer. 13:22 and 26, in addition to Ez. 16:37, to name just a few.

[27] Berlin, JPS, and NOAB all translate אחריתה as "future." However, the word has an overtone of "end" or at least the finality of an "outcome" which is captured in Hiller's suggestion "consequences" The phrase זכרה אחריתה is a powerful example of the temporal inversion noted in v. 7. The connection to *memory* in reference to *future* events is disorienting.

[28] The word choice of "spectacularly" for פְּלָאִים is an attempt to preserve the semantic connection to פלאים as defined by HALOT as something "extraordinary" or a "marvel." It retains this connection, but inverts the typical meaning into something spectacularly bad.

[29] This is a refrain, harkening back to v. 2 where the phrase was previously used. It also connects to v. 7 where a phrase with the same structure is found: "אין עוזר לה".

10. The foe spread his hand
    over all her treasures,
    indeed she has seen
    the nations enter her temple,
    concerning whom you commanded,
    ‘’They shall not enter[30] your assembly.’’[31]

11. All her people are groaning,
    they seek bread,
    they gave their treasures for food
    to return their life,
    “See God,

[30] The use of the root באה which Dobbs-Allsop points out (NOAB) connotes sexual intercourse.

[31] This is a direct reference to Deuteronomy 23:4. "לֹא-יָבֹא עַמּוֹנִי וּמוֹאָבִי, בִּקְהַל יְהוָה: גַּם דּוֹר עֲשִׂירִי, לֹא-יָבֹא לָהֶם בִּקְהַל יְהוָה עַד-עוֹלָם" Though 23:4 refers specifically to the Ammonites and Moabites, there is broad agreement that it is being applied to the Babylonians here. It may be that there was a historical reality being reflected in which the injunction against Ammonites and Moabites was broadened to include other enemy nations. Whether or not this is the case, the application of this verse makes sense poetically, with Ammonites and Moabites serving rhetorically as stand-ins for any enemy nations of the Israelites.

look at how I worthless I have become!”

12. May it not befall you, all passersby,
look and see!
Is there any pain like my pain
which was inflicted upon me,
which YHWH made me suffer
on the day of his burning wrath?

13. From on high he sent fire[32] into my bones
and sank it down,[33]
he spread a net for my feet,
he turned me back,
he gave me over[34] to desolation[35],

[32] A powerful segue from the end of the previous verse, as חרון defined by HALOT as “glow” conjures images of a glowing fire.

[33] The verb is difficult, unclear if the root is רדה or ירד. Also the feminine suffix has no appropriate antecedent (Berlin p.46). I have chosen to follow Hillers (p.11) understanding the root as ירד since it generates a paradigmatic parallelism wherein ירד amplifies its parallel in the first part of the clause, שלח.

[34] In order to preserve the repeated phrasing of נתנני found her and in v.14 I have used the same phrase “gave me over” in both places.

all day[36] long languishing

14. The yoke of my transgressions is bound fast,
    by his hand they were lashed tight,
    they mounted upon my neck,
    He[37]makes my strength falter[38],

---

[35] The use of שמם ties this verse to v.4 wherein the gates are שוממין connecting the imagery in this verse back to the city. NOAB notes this as a common verb connected to devastated lands as in Lev. 26:33, "וְהָיְתָה אַרְצְכֶם שְׁמָמָה" or Isa. 1:7 "אַרְצְכֶם שְׁמָמָה, עָרֵיכֶם שְׂרֻפוֹת אֵשׁ", other examples include Isa. 54:3, Jer. 12:11, and Am 9:14.

[36] Further connection with the previous verse, “the day of burning wrath” in v.12 leads languishing “all day long”

[37] “He” would be an unusual translation. Most read the yoke as active agent carrying out הכשיל. However, following Hillers, with YHWH as the active agent, this verse forms a tidy and consistent 3 clause mini-narrative with YHWH as the actor/tormentor. YHWH binds a yoke, causes strength to falter, then hands the yoked individual over into the hands of others. In truth, the Hebrew allows for ambiguity, not allowed for in English. The Hebrew is purposely ambiguous. הכשיל can be done by either YHWH or the yoke

[38] Many render הכשיל as “saps.” I chose “falter” because it preserves the physicality of being off-balance that is present in the original root. This choice of verb directly relates to the way in which domination is represented at the end of the verse as “not being able to stand.”

the Lord gave me over into the hands

of those I cannot withstand.

15. All my warriors trampled[39]

by the Lord in my midst,[40]

he proclaimed against me

a set time to crush my youths,

the Lord trod the winepress[41]

---

[39] I follow Berlin, understanding the root as סלל, "to trample down or flatten" as is done in the creation of siege ramps סללה as in 2 Kings 19:32 "לֹא יָבֹא אֶל-הָעִיר הַזֹּאת, וְלֹא-יוֹרֶה שָׁם חֵץ; וְלֹא-יְקַדְּמֶנָּה מָגֵן, וְלֹא-יִשְׁפֹּךְ עָלֶיהָ סֹלְלָה". This choice is preferred over Hillers suggestion סלה meaning, "heap up." The choice of סלל suits the verse semantically, initiating a violent and catastrophic image of trampling which is continued at the end of the verse with the destruction-through-treading of the wine press.

[40] Wordplay with קרבי which can mean both in my midst, but also in my innards. This continues a leitmotif of the tormented body between vv.13-17: v. 13 bones, legs v. 14 neck (hands), v. 15 innards, v. 16 eyes, v. 17 hands.

[41] Berlin (p.58) points out that destroying a winepress makes wine spills all over. This is therefore a more subtle way for the author to conjure the image of blood flowing like wine. There is also a recurring image of YHWH treading enemies like grapes in a press, e.g., Isa. 63:3, "פּוּרָה דָּרַכְתִּי לְבַדִּי, וּמֵעַמִּים אֵין-אִישׁ אִתִּי, וְאֶדְרְכֵם בְּאַפִּי, וְאֶרְמְסֵם בַּחֲמָתִי; וְיֵז נִצְחָם עַל-וְכָל-מַלְבּוּשַׁי אֶגְאָלְתִּי, בְּגָדַי"

of Dear Maiden Judah

16. For these things do I weep,
    my eyes, my eyes flow with water
    for far from me is the comforter,[42]
    one who might return my life.
    My children are desolate
    for the enemy has prevailed[43]

17. Zion spreads out her hands,
    there is no comforter.
    YHWH has commanded against Jacob
    that those around him are his foes,
    Jerusalem has become

[42] Both the verb בכה and the noun מנחם takes us back to v. 2. This suggests that we are now reading the first person point of view of the woman portrayed in third person in that verse.

[43] The verb גבר has a double meaning as prevailing, but also in identifying the enemy as masculine in contrast to the city who is gendered as feminine.

a menstruating woman among them.[44]

18. [45]YHWH is in the right,
    for I rebelled against his mouth.
    Listen, please, all you peoples,
    see my agony,
    my maidens and young men
    have been taken captive.[46]

19. I called to my loved ones[47],
    yet they cheated me.
    My priests and elders,

---

[44] It is forbidden for a menstruating woman to have sexual intercourse. This explains the somewhat puzzling depiction of Jerusalem as a menstruating woman. Since intercourse is forbidden to her, there literally cannot be one to comfort her, at least in a physically intimate manner (Berlin p.58)

[45] Verses 18-22 form a closing unit to chapter 1. This unit begins with a confession of sin followed by prayers for justice and vengeance.

[46] This, the first verse of the closing unit ends with a collection of lexical references to earlier verses. v. 12 – מכאבי, v. 4 – בתולות, v. 15 – בחור, v. 5 – הלכו בשבי.

[47] The loved ones may be a reference to the foreign gods, returning to the trope of idolatrous Israel as an adulterous woman (Hillers, p.19)

breathed their last in the city,

as they sought food for themselves

to return their lives.[48]

20. See, YHWH, my pain[49],

my bowls churn[50],

my heart turns over inside,

how bitter I am!

Outside, the sword bereaves,

inside is like death.[51]

---

[48] This marks a return to the image of individuals seeking food to stay alive first described in v. 11. The return heightens the pathos, not just because of the repeated image. In this verse, unlike the generality of v.11, there is specificity. The wealthiest and most elite or reduced to begging for food.

[49] Based on the repeated use of צר in the sense of enemy, the צר לי phrase has a double meaning. It is calling on YHWH to look on the city's suffering. However, it can also be read as "Look! YHWH has become my enemy (literally, 'a foe to me')."

[50] An extremely rare word, חמרמרו appears in only two other instances, in Job 16:16 and in Lamentations 2:11. In ch.2 it is also accompanied by the noun מעי.

[51] Inspired by any number of accounts of a siege in Tanakh, especially the description of Jerusalem's fall. (2 Kings 25:5, Jer. 39 and 52). The chapters all describe death –

21. They heard how I groaned,
there is no comforter for me.
All my enemies heard of my distress
and rejoiced that it was your doing.
Bring on the day you promised[52],
oh let them be like me!

22. Let all their iniquity come before you,
inflict upon them
what you inflicted upon me
on account of my transgressions
for my groans are great[53]
and my heart is languishing.

---

through starvation – "inside" (within the city) and the death by the enemy's sword "outside" (outside the city walls).

[52] This phrase is ambiguous. It can be read as part of the entreaty – to bring on the promised day of reckoning for the enemy. However, it can also be read as a statement, YHWH has brought -on the day of reckoning promised to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 32. Then it is followed by the request to bring on a reversal by punishing the enemy.

[53] רבות refers back to the very beginning of the chapter, v. 1 once again in the service of heightened pathos. In v. 1 רבתי described the once great number of denizens, the

prominence among the nations it once held. Now this describes either the great number or magnitude of the sorrowful groans let out by the city.

Lamentations 2

1. Alas, the Lord makes loathsome[54]
   with his wrath dear Zion.
   He cast down from heaven to earth
   the glory[55] of Israel

[54] The verb יעיב is a hapax legomenon. I follow Berlin and Hillers who take this word to be a derivation of the root תעב. Both cite as support for this usage Ps. 106:40 " וַיִּחַר-אַף יְהוָה בְּעַמּוֹ; וַיְתָעֵב, אֶת-נַחֲלָתוֹ" In that verse the verb ויתעב is used in a similar context to this one, as an action taken in response to YHWH's wrath. This translation, stemming from the root תעב is preferred because it better suits YHWH's violent and destructive actions in this verse and the surrounding ones as well.

[55] This is a reference to the Holy Temple. The Temple is repeatedly referred to symbolically through the use of the descriptor "תפארת". In some instances this reference is made explicit as in Isa. 64:10, "בֵּית קָדְשֵׁנוּ וְתִפְאַרְתֵּנוּ אֲשֶׁר הִלְלוּךָ אֲבֹתֵינוּ הָיָה לִשְׂרֵפַת אֵשׁ". Verses such as Isa. 64:10, where the connection between the Temple and תפארת are made explicit let us know that an implicit reference, such as the one in this verse, is also about the Temple. This symbolism is particularly relevant in light of the parallelism between "the glory" and YHWH's "footstool." The symbolic reference to the Temple through "glory" reinforces and is reinforced by the symbolism of YHWH's footstool as the Tabernacle.

and He did not remembered His footstool[56]

on the day of his wrath.

2. The Lord consumed and had no pity[57]

on the dwellings[58] of Jacob

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[56] In Ps. 132, a psalm which is connected to David bringing the ark to Jersualem from Philistine territory, the footstool is directly connected to the Ark, in v. 7, ״נָבוֹאָה לְמִשְׁכְּנוֹתָיו נִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לַהֲדֹם רַגְלָיו״. Just as "splendor" is a metonym for the Temple, so YHWH's "footstool" represents YHWH's holiest dwelling on earth , variously the Ark of the covenant, the Tabernacle (I Chr. 28:2, ״ וַיָּקָם דָּוִיד הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל-רַגְלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר שִׁמְעוּנִי אַחַי וְעַמִּי אֲנִי עִם-לְבָבִי לִבְנוֹת בֵּית מְנוּחָה לַאֲרוֹן בְּרִית-יְהוָה וְלַהֲדֹם רַגְלֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ״), or the Holy of Holies (Ezekiel 43:7 ״ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי בֶּן-אָדָם אֶת-מְקוֹם כִּסְאִי וְאֶת-מְקוֹם כַּפּוֹת רַגְלַי אֲשֶׁר אֶשְׁכָּן-שָׁם בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעוֹלָם וְלֹא יְטַמְּאוּ״).

[57] The idea of YHWH's destruction without restraint recurs through this chapter. This idea is conveyed here by pairing the violent and destructive action of the verb בלע with the phrase לא חמל. Not only does YHWH "consume" (active destruction) but YHWH "had no pity" (no restraint). The pairing of YHWH's destruction action and the phrase ״לא + ח.מ.ל.״ is used again in vv. 17 and 21. In vv.3, 8, and 18 the idea of a lack of restraint is also conveyed through metaphors which I will address in comments on those verses.

[58] HALOT offers both pasturage and abode/residence as definitions for נאות. Hillers, points out that in vv. 5 and 8 the verb בלע is used in conjunction with buildings, just as it

He demolished[59], in his rage[60]

the strongholds of Dear Judah.

He struck down to the ground,

profaned the kingdom and its rulers

---

is in this verse. Indeed the destruction of the city and temple is a primary focus of the chapter. For these reasons, I have chosen to follow Hillers and render נאות as "dwellings."

[59] As I have translated the verb שחת as destroyed I am following HALOT in tranlsation ״הָרַס״ as demolished. The word "demolished" also suits the context in this verse and in v. 17. In both verses buildings are being destroyed, so "demolished" suits the context well.

[60] This is the first of five words used to denote anger (אף, עברה, חרון אף, חמה, זעם). It is difficult to know precisely how to translate each one. I will use a combination of dictionary definitions, concordance work, and context to render them differently. The preponderance of anger-related words is noteworthy from a thematic perspective, calling attention to the focus on YHWH's anger in the first part of this chapter. It captures the nature and intensity of the anger and the role that this anger played in the destruction. The emotion is so powerful and out of control that perhaps there is a tacit accusation against the extremity of the destruction. In its depiction.

3. He cut off,[61] in burning wrath,

   the whole horn[62] of Israel

   he turned back[63] his right hand[64] in the face the enemy[65]

---

[61] The verb גדע appears here in the *qal* form which HALOT defines as "cut off," as in I Sam 2:31 "וְגָדַעְתִּי אֶת-זְרֹעֲךָ וְאֶת-זְרֹעַ בֵּית אָבִיךָ" Berlin translates this as chopped down, which HALOT attributes to the *piel* form.

[62] The horn is a symbol of strength according to HALOT. The examples throughout Tanakh are legion, e.g., Ez. 29:21 "בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אַצְמִיחַ קֶרֶן לְבֵית יִשְׂרָאֵל וּלְךָ אֶתֵּן פִּתְחוֹן-פֶּה בְּתוֹכָם", clearly this is a metaphor, not a promise to make a literal horn grow from the House of Israel. Psalms 75:11 uses the horn symbolism in a similar manner to this chapter, to depict weakening and strengthening, "וְכָל-קַרְנֵי רְשָׁעִים אֲגַדֵּעַ תְּרוֹמַמְנָה קַרְנוֹת צַדִּיק". In spite of its symbolic value, I have translated "horn" literally so as to maintain the power of the poetry by remaining in the realm of imagery and metaphor. I chose this rendering as opposed to making this symbolic representation explicit as others (e.g., JPS and NOAB) have by translating horn as "might".

This choice of "horn" over "might" also helps maintain consistency with the literalism of translating "ימינו" as "his right hand" in the next colon. Though the right hand is also symbolic of strength and power it is usually translated literally. Since the Hebrew uses two parallel metaphors in this verse, the translation similarly reflects that style.

[63] This verse marks the continuing prominence of the keyword "שוב". "Held back" might be a more colloquially appropriate translation, in this verse. However, I have translated it

and he burned in Jacob like a flaming fire

devouring all around

4. He bent his bow like an enemy,

   He[66] poised his right hand like a foe,[67]

---

as "turned back" in order to highlight the connection between this verse and others in chapter 1, particularly. 1:13 where we find the very similar phrase "הֱשִׁיבַנִי אָחוֹר".

[64] The right hand is a common metonym for one's overall strength in Tanakh. One such example, particularly in the context of YHWH's right hand is Ex. 15:6 "יְמִינְךָ יְהוָה נֶאְדָּרִי בַּכֹּחַ יְמִינְךָ יְהוָה תִּרְעַץ אוֹיֵב"

[65] The parallel images of the horn being cut off and YHWH's right hand being held back emphasize Israel's total impotence. This connects to the recurring motif which first appears in v. 2, of "בִּלַּע אֲדֹנָי וְלֹא חָמַל". That is, a dire situation created through YHWH's action that leads to total ruin through YHWH's inaction. In the image of the cut off horn, the author conveys that YHWH has laid waste to Israel's might (YHWH's action), this is bad enough. Then YHWH, Israel's defender, holds back YHWH's own protective might (YHWH's inaction).

[66] The verb "נִצַּב" is difficult as it is *nif* 3rd m.s. even as it seems to refer to the f.s. "יְמִינוֹ". Following Berlin and JPS is translate this verb as the active, "He poised." As YHWH is the active agent for the other three verbs in this verse, this translation simply makes more sense.

He slew all those treasured in your eye, [68]

in Dear Zion's tent

He poured out his rage[69] like fire.

Perhaps the word choice can be explained by prosody. The *nif'al* form allows for three of the four verbs to end with an "-ah" vowel in the second syllable (דָּרַךְ, נִצַּב, שָׁפַךְ). This leads to a repeated sound as opposed to the "-ee" ending the correct *hif'il* form would have provided.

[67] It is apparent from Ezekiel 39:3 that the standard use of bow and arrow is that the left hand holds the bow and the right holds the arrow: "וְהִכֵּיתִי קַשְׁתְּךָ מִיַּד שְׂמֹאולֶךָ וְחִצֶּיךָ מִיַּד יְמִינֶךָ אַפִּיל". Thus, the picture drawn by this verse is that of YHWH as an archer at the ready, holding the arrow taught, ready to fire. Furthermore, given that the right hand is a symbol of strength, the idea the phrase "נצב ימינו כצר" has a double meaning. In addition to its practical meaning in the context of an archer, the phrase also has a symbolic meaning. YHWH's "right hand," i.e., YHWH's power, is at the ready, prepared to attack like an enemy. YHWH indeed carries though on the promise of this attack in v. 8 wherein YHWH does not hold back YHWH's destructive hand

(לֹא-הֵשִׁיב יָדוֹ מִבַּלֵּעַ).

[68] There is no possessive suffix to indicate "<u>your</u> eye." However, the possessive is needed to capture the sense of this phrase. It seems to mean something along the lines of, "you look upon them as treasures." The phrase is found in Ezekiel 24 several times with this meaning. In Ez. 24:25 it refers specifically to sons and daughters, an apt context applicable to this verse in Lamentations, as well:

5. The Lord was like an enemy,
   He consumed Israel,
   consumed all her citadels
   He destroyed His strongholds
   He multiplied in Dear Judah
   moaning and mourning

6. He has ravaged[70] his festival booth as a garden,[71]
   He has destroyed his tabernacle[72]

"בְּיוֹם קָחְתִּי מֵהֶם אֶת-מָעוּזָּם מְשׂוֹשׂ תִּפְאַרְתָּם אֶת-מַחְמַד עֵינֵיהֶם וְאֶת-מַשָּׂא נַפְשָׁם בְּנֵיהֶם וּבְנוֹתֵיהֶם"

[69] While HALOT defines this as "YHWH's anger," BDF offers the definition of "rage." The destructive and uncontrollable character of the anger in this verse, "poured out" and "like fire" leads to this translation. There are numerous verses in Tanakh that use this word. However, its connection to Pinchas struck me as enlightening. In Num. 25:11 YHWH describes Pinchas's actions using the noun חמה to characterize them, "פִּינְחָס בֶּן-אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן-אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן הֵשִׁיב אֶת-חֲמָתִי מֵעַל בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקַנְאוֹ אֶת-קִנְאָתִי בְּתוֹכָם". The extreme, almost out-of-control nature of Pinchas's act which is said to reflect YHWH's חמה suits the translation "rage."

[70]HALOT defines "וַיַּחְמֹס" as "treat violently." I use the synonymous word "ravaged"for the sake of concision and poetry

YHWH has caused festival and Shabbat to be forgotten in Zion.

He spurned with his indignant[73] wrath, king and priest.

7. The Lord rejected His altar

renounced[74] His sanctuary,

---

[71] Following Berlin (p.66), I understand this colon to describe the treatment of a sacred festival booth as if it were a merely utilitarian garden booth. This reading is supported by the following colon in which the tabernacle is destroyed. In this reading, these first two cola are parallel, as they both reflect disregard for the inherent holiness of sacred structures. The second colon mirrors and amplifies the first one, as the disturbing destruction of a sukkah leads to the devastating destruction of the tabernacle.

[72] HALOT offers a number of definitions for מועד, including "tent of meeting" (tabernacle) and "time of feast" (festival). The word is used twice in this verse in two different contexts. It is therefore fitting that the first rendering reflects the context of sacred structures as "tabernacle." The context of the second usage is sacred time, thus the rendering "festivals."

[73] HALOT defines "זַעַם" as "curse." BDB includes "indignation" among its definitions, which I am opting for here.

[74] This is an extremely rare verb. Other than this verse, it is used in only one other instance, in Ps. 89, a text that is perhaps explicitly alluded to in this chapter. Ps. 89:40 read, "נֵאַרְתָּה בְּרִית עַבְדֶּךָ חִלַּלְתָּ לָאָרֶץ נִזְרוֹ". Here the psalmist accuses YHWH of abandoning YHWH's covenant with the House of David. If this psalm is indeed being alluded to by

delivered into the hands of the enemy

the walls of her citadel

They made noise in the house of YHWH as a festival day[75].

---

this chapter, then it would be an excellent example of intra-biblical commentary. The allusions here, in this verse and elsewhere in this chapter thus serve as an accusation against YHWH for breaking the covenant through the destruction of Jerusalem and the defeat of the House of David.

Furthermore, there is a great deal of sound play throughout this chapter. I would contend that this plays a role in word choice here, as "נִאֵר" allows for sound play with "וַיִּנְאַץ " in the previous verse. The other factor in the use of such a rare word is to emphasize a key theme in the chapter. The author uses three different words all related to rejection between this verse and the previous one are in order to fill in the shades and contours of YHWH's rejection. As was noted earlier, this was also done to highlight the theme of YHWH's anger. Earlier in the chapter multiple words all related to anger were used to describe YHWH's emotional state.

[75] The word מוֹעֵד used in the previous verse, is repeated here, but in a different context, and to devastating effect. In the previous verse it refers to the holy, ordained festivals for which the temple was built. Not only have these festivals ceased, YHWH has caused them to be utterly forgotten. Now, in their place, those holy festivals are replaced by the enemy's victory celebrations. Once the temple rang with the sounds of sacred celebration, sanctioned by YHWH's law. Now, the festive noise in the temple is that of the enemy who defiles and profanes the holy place.

8. YHWH planned to destroy the wall of dear Zion.

   He stretched out a line[76]

   He did not turn back[77] his hand from consuming.[78]

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[76] Stretching out a line is part of the construction process in the ancient world as described in Isaiah 44:13, "חָרַשׁ עֵצִים נָטָה קָו יְתָאֲרֵהוּ בַּשֶּׁרֶד". This phrase is also used to describe YHWH's construction of the world in Job 38:5, "מִי-שָׂם מְמַדֶּיהָ כִּי תֵדָע אוֹ מִי-נָטָה עָלֶיהָ קָו". This verse is therefore an ironic inversion of the building process laid out in Job 38:5. Just as methodically as YHWH planned and built the world, YHWH planned and carried out Jerusalem's destruction. This is merely the beginning of an extended inversion of YHWH's creation as described in Job 38.

[77] As in 2:3, colloquial or idiomatic English would use "hold back" or "withdraw" to render "הֵשִׁיב". However, as was the case in 2:3, I have used "turn back" to render "הֵשִׁיב". Here too, I have done this in order to highlight the connection to previous uses of "הֵשִׁיב" (including 2:3 and 1:13) and to emphasize the strong prominence of the keyword/root שוב.

[78] This is another instance of the motif of unrestrained destruction (cf. 2:2, 2:3). Interesting to note that this verse marks an ironic inversion of 2:3. In 2:3 YHWH <u>does</u> turn YHWH's hand back against the enemy spelling utter ruin for Jerusalem. Here YHWH does <u>not</u> turn YHWH's hand back against Jerusalem but sadly the outcome is the same – utter ruin.

He caused rampart and wall to mourn

together they wasted away.

9. Her gates sank in the ground,

   He destroyed and shattered her bars[79]

   her king and her princes are among the nations:

   there is no instruction,

[79] This verse continues the ironic inversion of the Creation process as described in Job 38. In Job 38:6 the root טבע, the act of sinking is an essential part of "building" the world, in the form of sinking a cornerstone,

"עַל-מָה אֲדָנֶיהָ הָטְבָּעוּ אוֹ מִי-יָרָה אֶבֶן פִּנָּתָהּ". Whereas in this verse the sinking is an act of destruction. In Job 38:10 there are still more parallels all of which are overturned, "וָאֶשְׁבֹּר עָלָיו חֻקִּי וָאָשִׂים בְּרִיחַ וּדְלָתָיִם"

The root שבר and the noun בריח are both used in this verse. Furthermore, though the exact word for gate used in this verse, שער, is not used in Job, the word "דְּלָתָיִם" can be understood to mean "gate."

If Lamentations can be understood as drawing these parallels, both in this verse and v. 8 between Creation and the destruction of Jerusalem/the Holy Temple, then it adds a powerful depth to the lament. The implication here is that the destruction described in Lamentations upends the very cosmic order as YHWH undoes the very fundamental acts of Creation.

her prophets too found no vision from YHWH.[80]

10. They sit upon the ground in silence
    the elders of Dear Zion,
    they raised up[81] ash upon their heads,
    they bind up their sackcloth,
    they lowered to the ground their heads[82]
    the maidens of Jerusalem.

---

[80] There is no teaching of the revealed law, passed down and rooting the people. There is also no immediate, spontaneous guidance in the form of prophetic visions. The force of these two statements together is to say that there is no divine guidance. Taking it one step further, it is another way of saying that the people are lost.

[81] This translation preserves the paradigmatic parallelism between the first and second parts of the verse. We have 3rd pl. perfect *hif* verbs with contrasting meaning. The verse thus shows that mourning is taking place at both extremes, raising up and lowering down. This is merely the first in a chain of parallelisms composed of opposing binaries that serve to create numerous merisms throughout the verse. The message is that mourning is taking place everywhere (ground-head), in all actions (raised-lowered), by everyone (old-young, male-female).

[82] I preserve the syntax of the Hebrew, even if it is a bit awkward in the English, in order to preserve and highlight the parallel structure of the verse. The third colon begins with

11. Tears ceased to fill my eyes,

my innards burned,[83]

---

verb of upward movement, “raised up” ending with “their heads.” This parallel colon begins with a contrasting verb of downward movement, “lowered” but ends with the identical noun, “their heads."

[83] As noted in chapter 1, this extremely rare word appears in only two other places, 1:20 and Job 16:16. HALOT translates it as “glow, burn.”In Job we find, ״פָּנַי חָמַרְמָרוּ מִנִּי-בֶכִי״. This imagery is certainly the source of the former definition: a face glowing red from weeping. It is not a far step from the glowing red heat of tear-soaked cheeks, to the feeling of innards burning on account of deep sorrow. A look at the surrounding text in Job 16 brings to light numerous parallels between that chapter and this one. This is to be expected since both chapters describe terrible suffering and sorrow brought about by YHWH. Indeed, some of the shared language is rather common and found throughout Tanakh. However, there is a preponderance of shared imagery and shared lexical choices – both common and rare alike. For example, שק and עפר are both fairly common words used to indicate mourning throughout Tanakh. Their shared use would not be noteworthy in and of itself. However, in both places they appear in a verse immediately preceding the extremely rare word ״חָמַרְמָרוּ״ here in 2:10 and in Job 16:15. Job 16:15 also features the metaphorical us of קרן, a prominent image in this chapter, ״שַׂק תָּפַרְתִּי עָלַי גִּלְדִּי וְעִלַּלְתִּי בֶעָפָר קַרְנִי״. There are further examples connected to the next colon which I will note there (Cf, n. 33). Based on the abundance of shared elements it is possible to conclude that one text

spilled out upon the ground is my liver,[84]

on account of the breaking[85] of my dear people,

at the fainting of the young ones and the babies

in the town's plazas.

12. To their mothers they are saying,

"Where is grain and wine?"

In their fainting,[86] as if struck dead

---

is meant to allude to the other. Another option given the possible contemporaneity of composition is that these two share a common literary source.

[84] Job 16:13 features a parallel image. Though the precise language of ״כבד״ is not found in Job, the image found there is virtually identical. ״יָסֹבּוּ עָלַי רַבָּיו יְפַלַּח כִּלְיוֹתַי וְלֹא יַחְמוֹל יִשְׁפֹּךְ לָאָרֶץ מְרֵרָתִי״ Gall, which is produced by the liver, spills out on the ground. There are two further parallels between that verse and this chapter. For one, there is YHWH's merciless abuse, expressed in the same language of ״לא+חמל״. There is also the imagery of divine archers setting upon the sufferer. This provides further support to the conclusion drawn above (n33) of allusion or common literary source.

[85] Though HALOT offers the more idiomatic "collapse," I follow Berlin in using "breaking." This word choice reflects the recurrence of the root שבר, also found in v. 9 by tying it more closely to the use of the root there as "shattering."

[86] The same verb, "fainting" is used to translate בעטף in v. 11 and התעטפם here, even though they the former is *nif'al* and the later is *hitpa'el*. HALOT has similar definitions

in the city's squares

in the spilling[87] out of their lives

[88]at their mothers' bosom.

13. What can I attest to for you,

What shall I compare you to, Dear Jerusalem?

What shall I measure you against,

in order to comfort you, maiden of Dear Zion,

for your devastation is as great as the sea -

who shall heal you?

14. Your prophets perceived for you

falsity and fraud[89]

---

for each form, utilizing the verb "faint" for both of them. This serves to preserve in English the close lexical connection between the two verses in Hebrew.

[87] The repeated motif of suffering expressed by means of something spilling forth from a human body is a further lexical connection between this verse and v. 11.

[88] The verse ends with a pattern of three cola in sequence, each beginning with ״ב-״. The structure of this pattern builds tension which is broken when the pattern is broken with the final colon. This structure serves to highlight the final colon, a devastating image made all the more so by the build-up.

and they did not reveal to you your wrongdoing

to turn around your fortunes,

they perceived false oracles for you

and deception.

15. All passersby[90] clap their hands at you

They whistle and wag their heads at dear Jerusalem[91]

Is this the city about which about which is said,

---

[89] As definite by HALOT, the word originates in the practice of plastering over or whitewashing. An relevant example of its use is Ez. 43:10-11, ״ וְהוּא בֹּנָה חַיִץ וְהִנָּם טָחִים אֹתוֹ תָּפֵל אֱמֹר אֶל-טָחֵי תָפֵל וְיִפֹּל״. These verses supports the translation of ״תָּפֵל״ as “fraud.” The act of whitewashing in them gives the illusion of quality and strength, a fraudulent appearance.

[90] The motif of passersby witnessing the devastation is repeated from 1:12. The phrasing in this verse is another possible allusion to Ps.89. Ps.89:42 reads ״שַׁסֵּהוּ כָּל-עֹבְרֵי דָרֶךְ הָיָה חֶרְפָּה לִשְׁכֵנָיו״ thus depicting not just passersby, but the same context of scornful passersby witnessing the devastation wrought by YHWH.

[91] The verse features the rhyming of כפים and ירושלים. This rhyme is noteworthy, as it draws attention to Jerusalem and make it a focal point of the verse. The presence of rhyme also highlights the centrality of sound in this verse as derisive sounds of clapping and whistling, play a significant role.

"It is wholly beautiful,

a joy for the whole earth?"

16. All[92] your enemies open their mouths against you,

they whistle and gnash[93] their teeth

they say, "We consumed this one.

This is the day we hoped for

we have found it, we have seen it!"

17. YHWH did that which He had planned

He fulfilled His word

which he commanded in days of old.

---

[92] The theme of totality recurs throughout this and the previous verse. This is the third use of כל and if you include כלילת, it's the fourth. This mirrors the recurring motif of "destruction with no mercy." In the world of Lamentations there is nothing partial, no half steps.

[93] This word appears in only four other verses in Tanakh. Three of these instances are in Psalms (Ps. 35:16, 37:12, and 112:10) and in all of those verses an evil person gnashes their teeth in scorn, only to be punished in the end. However, the fourth instance is in Job 16, a text noted above for parallels to this chapter (n .33). In Job 16:9, the scornful one who gnashes teeth torments Job, with no redemptive note, a context quite similar to this verse, "אַפּוֹ טָרַף וַיִּשְׂטְמֵנִי חָרַק עָלַי בְּשִׁנָּיו צָרִי יְלַטּוֹשׁ עֵינָיו לִי" .

He demolished and had no pity.[94]

He made the enemy rejoice over you

He raised the horn of your foes.[95]

18. Their heart cried out to the Lord.[96]

Wall of Dear Zion -

[94] A recurrence of the motif which opens the chapter in v. 2, (cf. n. 4) the destruction is without pity, indicating that it is without restraint.

[95] Parallel to v. 3, this image captures a poignant inversion of the Israelites' state. It is bad enough that their horn (might) is cut, but now the foe's horn (might) is raised. In other words, YHWH has not only weakened the nation, YHWH has strengthened the enemy.

[96] This is a difficult phrase. First there is the curious construct of the m.s. noun, "לב" with a 3rd m.pl. suffix attached. Poetic license can allow for this as if there is one "collective" heart. However, this begs the question of whose heart is being referred to. I follow Berlin, reading this as a declarative statement, standing on its own, but connected to what follows. The group who heart is referred to is the people of the nation. By opening the verse with this colon, the implication is that the "wall of Dear Zion" is a stand-in for the people, or at least it is closely identified with them. As the people cry out, so too the wall weeps in sorrow.

let tears[97] stream down like a torrent

day and night.

Give yourself no relief,

your eyes no respite.

19. Awake and cry out at night

at the beginning of every watch

spill out your heart like water

before the face of the Lord

raise your hands up to Him

for the sake of your young one's lives

who are fainting from hunger

at every street corner.

20. See YHWH, and look[98] upon whom you have inflicted,

should women eat their own fruit

[97] This continues the motif of the crying female from 1:2 and 1:16. It also provides another possible identity for the anonymous female figure who cries in both of those verses, namely the "Wall of Dear Zion."

[98] This is another connection to chapter 1, this refrain found in 1:11, ״רְאֵה יְהוָה וְהַבִּיטָה״ is repeated verbatim. There too it calls upon YHWH to look specifically upon the suffering of the people. There is an implicit accusation behind this phrase that attendant suffering

the young[99] ones they cared for[100]?

Should priest and prophet

be killed in the Lord's sanctuary?

21. They lie on the ground[101] in the streets

young and old

---

is unwarranted and unjust. This is even more apparent in this verse containing the horrifying description of women cannablizing their own children.

[99] The use of the noun עולל is extremely noteworthy in this and previous verses in this chapter (2:11, 2:19, 2:20). The noun is evocative of the verb עלל, which pertains to inflicting suffering. This connection made explicit through the repeated use of that verb in the previous chapter and this one as well (1:12, 22 – used twice, 2:20) This link of powerfully poignant. In the upside-down world of Lamentations, children seem to exist solely to inflict suffering upon their parents through witnessing the children's pain.

[100] This word is a hapax legomenon. HALOT defines it as "health and loveliness of new-born children." It is clearly related to the verb in the next verse, which gives some indication as to its connection to caring for children. Hillers (p. 40) also asserts that there is an Akkadian cognate which also connotes child care.

[101] A return to the motif of being on the ground, found in vv. 10 & 11 where the phrase לארץ appears 3 times.

my maidens and my young men[102]

they fell by the sword

you slew them on the day of your wrath

you slaughtered[103] and showed no mercy.[104]

---

[102] As with the first colon, this description of the population by its extremes: young/old, male/female is also found in vv. 10 & 11. The description is a merism, so that although only the extremes are mentioned, one is to that everything in between, the full spectrum of the population is involved. With its reference to "בְּתוּלֹתַי וּבַחוּרַי " the verse also refers us back to 1:15 and 18. In 1:18 the precise phrase is even utilized.

[103] Based on HALOT's definition, this word has a connotation of slaughtering animals, though it can be used in other instances. The word choice is intentionally ironic in light of the reference to the מקדש, in v. 20. The use of this verb heightens the pathos of the verse. Formerly, this was the site of the sanctuary where animals were slaughtered for the sake of sacrifice. Now young and old, male and female, priest and prophet are slaughtered like animals. This also raises an implicit question or charge against YHWH. The animals were slaughtered for the sake of sacrifice; these people are slaughtered – to what end? There is also certainly a relationship between the choice of verb "טָבַחְתָּ " and the use of the hapax legomenon "טִפֻּחִים" in v. 20. The soundplay operating between the two words functions in a similar fashion to the repeated use of the verb root עלל meaning "to deal harshly" or "inflict" and the noun עולל meaning "young ones." In both of these cases, connecting such a violently terrible verb to a noun referring to children serves to underscore the terrible violence being wrought upon the young.

22. You called - as on a festival day -

my attackers[105] from all around

on the day of YHWH's wrath

no one escaped or survived.

Those whom I cared for[106] and reared,

my enemy has wiped out.[107]

---

[104] For the third time this chapter, there is the description of destruction with no pity, indicating a total lack of restraint.

[105] An uncommon but not unattested definition (HALOT mentions two instances: Is.54:15 and Ps. 59:4) of the root גור found in HALOT.

[106] This verb is found in one other instance, in Is 48:13, ״אַף-יָדִי יָסְדָה אֶרֶץ וימיני טִפְּחָה שָׁמָיִם״. The Isaiah verse is not directly relevant but it is still somewhat helpful. YHWH "caring for" the heavens (possibly by spreading them out, or by helping them to develop) during Creation. Insofar as the verse provides a context of care at the beginning of life, we may contend that it reinforces a similar context for the verb in this verse. The accompanying verb in this verse ״רִבִּיתִי״ also argues in favor of a context of child care for the verb.

[107] HALOT defines this verb, the *piel* of כלה as "destroy, exterminate." Given the use of "destroy" to translate שחת, this leaves exterminate as a translation. Hillers uses "wiped out" which is synonymous with "exterminated." This comes down to personal preference, I feel "exterminate" sounds distant, almost clinical. "Wiped out" meanwhile, sounds more colloquial even visceral so I have opted to use that phrase.

Lamentations 3

1. I am the man[108] who knew[109] suffering[110]

2. by the rod[111] of His rage[112]

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[108] The chapter opens with a clear indication of a change in voice for this chapter. In ch.1 we find a depiction of Jerusalem gendered as feminine, and ch. 2 continues in the same vein. With the identification of the author as "הַגֶּבֶר" Ch. 3's perspective is definitively male.

[109] The verb "רָאָה" is typically connected to sight and could be translated as "saw." However this might imply the man is an observer, a witness, and the context makes clear that this man has experienced these afflictions firsthand. Therefore, HALOT's definitions of "know" and "felt, experienced" for this verb are applicable here.

[110] The use of this word, connects this man to ch. 1 where it is used in vv. 3, 7, & 9. This is in turn connects the man directly to the suffering of Judah and Jerusalem. On the one hand, the connection to the destruction in Judah and Jerusalem could easily be inferred based on the inclusion of "the man's" perspective in this work. On the other hand, the marked shift in perspective could make a reader wonder whether Jerusalem's destruction is the source of the man's suffering. Therefore, linguistic connections such as this one, and others throughout this chapter, firmly cement the situational/historical connection. This is no anonymous "archetypal" sufferer (or not *simply* archetypal, as there are more universal elements later in the chapter), he is directly connected to the destruction.

[111] While the uses of שבט are legion throughout Tanakh, there are some specific uses that this verse evokes. First and foremost, there is its use to refer to a shepherd's crook. Psalm 23 features just such a use in Ps. 23:4 "לֹא-אִירָא רָע כִּי-אַתָּה עִמָּדִי שִׁבְטְךָ וּמִשְׁעַנְתֶּךָ". The shepherds crook is significant because it imagines YHWH as a shepherd, an image which is inverted in this chapter. Unlike the protective, nurturing shepherd of Ps. 23, Lamentations 3 imagines YHWH as a kind of "anti-shepherd." An idea that will be explored further below.

As defined by HALOT, שבט is also a rod of the sort used for punishment, violence. This "rod" image works on the literal level as the author describes his own suffering in v. 3. The definition of "rod"also works on the metaphorical level. In this sense, the author is a stand-in for the nation of Israel. Seen through this lens of national tragedy, the rod is the enemy foreign powers a role Assyria plays in Isaiah 10:5 "הוֹי אַשּׁוּר שֵׁבֶט אַפִּי וּמַטֶּה-הוּא בְיָדָם זַעְמִי".

[112] Another instance where word choice calls to mind events described earlier in Lamentations. In 2:2 "עֶבְרָתוֹ " is used in connection with YHWH's destruction. Bearing in mind its use in the earlier verse adds a dimension of destructive power to the rod. A dimension that is perhaps implied, but amplified when this verse is brought into dialogue with 2:2.

3. Me,[113] He drove, and forced to go
   in darkness[114], with no light[115].

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[113] In each of the first three verses, the author uses a different 1st singular pronouns to refer to himself. Therefore, while the phrasing of "Me, He drove" is a bit awkward, I follow Berlin, utilizing it in order to allow for an echo of the Hebrew.

[114] Throughout the chapter, particularly in this early part, typical images of YHWH which serve as biblical literary tropes are subverted. Numerous psalmic images and parallel texts are evoked for precisely this purpose. Though, at times the ideas from the psalms are also affirmed. In these early verses, with its images of "YHWH as shepherd," Psalm 23 is a prominent parallel text. Unlike the image of YHWH as shepherd imagined in this verse, the one in 23:2, most certainly does not lead the flock into darkness. ״בַּנְאוֹת דֶּשֶׁא יַרְבִּיצֵנִי עַל-מֵי מְנֻחוֹת יְנַהֲלֵנִי״ In Psalm 23, even when darkness is involved, there is no need to fear because YHWH protects in benevolence, Ps. 23:4 -גַּם כִּי-אֵלֵךְ בְּגֵיא צַלְמָוֶת לֹא-אִירָא רָע כִּי אַתָּה עִמָּדִי״.

[115] The phrasing here of, ״חֹשֶׁךְ וְלֹא-אוֹר״, extends the motif from the previous chapter of expressing the intensity of suffering and punishment through a synergistic combination of presence and absence. In ch. 2 the "presence" was some kind of destructive force and the "absence" was pity (vv. 2, 17, 21) which might have mitigated the destruction. In this verse, darkness is the "presence" and the "absence" is light. There are, of course varying degrees of darkness, from the absence of light, we understand that it is not just dark, but pitch black.

4. To me alone He returns,

   He turns His hand[116] against me all day long.

5. He has worn away my flesh and skin,

   He has shattered my bones[117]

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[116] The word "יָדוֹ" works on two levels here. In its primary meaning of "hand" it conjures the image of the shepherd's hand turning the rod over against one of his flock, to strike it. It also works in the extended meaning of "strength" or "power" (HALOT) as it was used in the previous chapter, 2:8 "לֹא-הֵשִׁיב יָדוֹ מִבַּלְּעֵ" In this second sense of the word the author reinforces the idea that again and again YHWH is turning YHWH's strength ("יָדוֹ") against the author causing suffering.

[117] The mortification of skin, flesh, and bone is connected with punishment for sin. We find a combination of these parts of the body in addition to the verb "worn away" in parallel texts all pertaining to the suffering of the sinner. In Ps. 32:3 the psalmist sins and is punished for remaining silent, for not confessing wrong-doing "כִּי-הֶחֱרַשְׁתִּי בָּלוּ עֲצָמָי". Psalm 38 depicts such bodily harm as punishment for sin as well, "אֵין-מְתֹם בִּבְשָׂרִי מִפְּנֵי זַעְמֶךָ אֵין-שָׁלוֹם בַּעֲצָמַי מִפְּנֵי חַטָּאתִי". In Micah3:2 all three elements come together "שֹׂנְאֵי טוֹב וְאֹהֲבֵי רָעָה גֹּזְלֵי עוֹרָם מֵעֲלֵיהֶם וּשְׁאֵרָם מֵעַל עַצְמוֹתָם". While the precise word בשר is not used, a synonymous word, שאר is used, conveying the same meaning. These examples help identify this grouping of elements as a trope for the suffering of the sinner. The first person perspective and the attendant depiction of this suffering as too much to bear raises an implicit critique of the punishments described in the other texts referenced.

6. He has built upon[118] and besieged me
   with bitterness and hardship.[119]

7. He causes me to dwell me in dark places
   like those eternally dead.[120]

A further element of this verse is that it maintains the connection between the suffering it describes and the events of earlier chapters. The image of YHWH's violence going as deep as the bones recurs from 1:13, "מִמָּרוֹם שָׁלַח-אֵשׁ בְּעַצְמֹתַי וַיִּרְדֶּנָּה".

[118]Enveloped comes from בנה עלי the sense in which I have been "built upon" implies being buried, or enveloped. Rendering this phrase as "buried" would require a Hebrew burial verb. Also, "built upon" has the sense of being used as a foundation, but not the digging down quality that burial has. Given the "unbuilding" from the previous chapter (2:8-9), being forcibly built upon is painfully ironic.

[119] This is a rare word, used in only three other verses, one of them, Neh. 9:32, presumably post-dates Lamentations. The first is Ex. 18:8 "וַיְסַפֵּר מֹשֶׁה לְחֹתְנוֹ...אֵת כָּל-הַתְּלָאָה The second is in Num. 20:14 . "וַיִּשְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה מַלְאָכִים מִקָּדֵשׁ אֶל-מֶלֶךְ אֱדוֹם. אֲשֶׁר מְצָאָתַם בַּדֶּרֶךְ..." אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ אֵת כָּל-הַתְּלָאָה אֲשֶׁר מְצָאָתְנוּ". Based on its use in these verses to describe a narrative retelling of hardship, there seems to be a sense of numerous and varied trails and tribulations. Thus, while the word itself is singular in number, multiple, different (non-specific) hardships are implied.

8. He walled me in and I cannot go out,
   he weighed me down with chains.[121]

9. Though[122] I call out and cry for help,[123]
   he shuts out my prayer[124]

---

[120] JPS, Hillers, and NOAB translate this phrase as "long dead." Berlin (p. 90) contends that the point here is that death is final. This phrase is therefore not about when the deceased died, but rather it is about the finality of death. A closer reading of the parallel text in Psalm 143:3 bears this out, "דִּכָּא לָאָרֶץ חַיָּתִי הוֹשִׁיבַנִי בְמַחֲשַׁכִּים כְּמֵתֵי עוֹלָם". The parallelism between "מֵתֵי עוֹלָם" with those "בְמַחֲשַׁכִּים הוֹשִׁיבַנִי" makes more sense as an amplification of those who cannot speak to YHWH because of inaccessibility. Recently deceased, or long ago deceased is not what makes the dead unable to speak. It is the finality of death that is the point in this verse from Psalm.

[121] While the meaning here is "chains," it also has a resonance with נחשת. Just as with other elements, here too the positive is inverted, turned negative. נחשת associated with riches, is turned into the bonds of captivity. In Jer. 52:17, we find a description of the temple riches carted away to Babylonia which illustrates brass as a symbol of wealth. The mention of brass in that context may also explain the use of this word for "chains," namely, as a way to evoke the destruction.

וַיִּשְׁאוּ "וְאֶת-עַמּוּדֵי הַנְּחֹשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר לְבֵית-יְהוָה, וְאֶת-הַמְּכֹנוֹת וְאֶת-יָם הַנְּחֹשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵית-יְהוָה--שִׁבְּרוּ כַשְׂדִּים אֶת-כָּל-נְחֻשָּׁתָם, בָּבֶלָה"

[122] The structure of "גַּם כִּי" followed by 1st sing. imperfect calls to mind Ps. 23:4. "גַּם כִּי-אֵלֵךְ בְּגֵיא צַלְמָוֶת" . Once again, however, Psalms is alluded to here in order evoke pathos and to emphasize the severity of the situation here, when seen in contrast to Psalms.

[123] HALOT defines שוע as "cry for help." Looking at the verb in other verses, it is clear that it is a cry for help from YHWH. It appears repeatedly and most prominently in Psalms, 9 out of the 21 uses in Tanakh are in Psalms. It is used primarily to express a desire or belief that if the pious cry out to YHWH for assistance, YHWH will respond. One of the few instances when YHWH does not respond, is when the Psalmist's enemies call out for help in 18:42 "יְשַׁוְּעוּ וְאֵין-מוֹשִׁיעַ עַל-יְהוָה וְלֹא עָנָם". This is therefore yet another instance of Lamentations 3 enlisting the language of Psalms in order to comment on the current situation. The author is either calling into question the Psalmists' assertions that YHWH will answer or is using this trope to underscore the extremity of his current situation. That is, perhaps the author wants to emphasize that his situation is so severe that he is may as well be an enemy of YHWH, as depicted in Psalms 18:42.

It is noteworthy, and also not surprising, that the verb is used in a similar fashion to this verse several times in Job. Job's unanswered cries to YHWH for help (Job 19:7 and 30:20) illustrate the extremity of his situation. One other instance of an unanswered call to YHWH found in Habakkuk is noteworthy because it is one of the few instances in which both זעק and שוע are used. The events of Lamentations respond to the destruction wrought by the Babylonians and foretold in Habakkuk 1. Also given Habakkuk's composition, likely before the destruction of the temple, this verse in Lamentations may be a direct reference to verse Hab.1:2

10. He walled in my ways with hewn stones,

    twisted my paths[125]

11. He is a lurking[126] bear to me,

    a lion[127] in hiding

"עַד-אָנָה יְהוָה שִׁוַּעְתִּי וְלֹא תִשְׁמָע אֶזְעַק אֵלֶיךָ חָמָס וְלֹא תוֹשִׁיעַ"

[124] This statement works on two levels. It is a theological statement, as the author feels his prayer is shut out. It also works as a statement of fact, the temple has been destroyed, so the traditional means of worship through sacrifice is not possible. In this way, prayer is quite literally shut out.

This image recurs in 3:44. The two verses provide a kind of mutual commentary. The reason for the prayer being shut out is clarified and even amplified. It is shut out, because, as the author depicts himself in the proximate verses, he is walled in and his paths are blocked. 3:44 adds to this strengthening the blockage by depicting YHWH as walled off as well.

[125] The verse in Job 19:8 is parallel with this verse and with v. 7 as well.

[126] Psalm 10 is a strong parallel. In Ps. 10:8 and 10:9 the root ארב is used multiple times. Specifically in Ps.10: 9 multiple elements are combined, "יֶאֱרֹב בַּמִּסְתָּר כְּאַרְיֵה בְסֻכֹּה יֶאֱרֹב". The significance of this parallel text is that in Psalm 10, the attacker is a wicked one, a

12. He forced me off my way and tore me to pieces,

    leaving me desolate[128]

13. He bent[129] his bow and he set[130] me

    as a target[131] for his arrow

---

wicked one who has no faith in YHWH (10:2-3). Yet here, the attacker is clearly YHWH. Thus, once again, the text from Psalms is tacitly critiqued by Lamentations.

[127] Further emphasis on YHWH as the "anti-shepherd." Typically the shepherd protects his flock from predators. Not only is YHWH not fulfilling this role, but in this verse YHWH has transformed into the very predators YHWH is supposed to protect from (Berlin p.91).

[128] This is an overlapping description, שמם/שממה found in an earlier verse (1:13). This another instance where the language ties the author's plight in Lamentations 3 to the events of Lamentations 1.

[129]The image of the divine archer meting out retribution against the sinner recurs throughout Tanakh in Deut 32:23, Ps.38:3, Job 16:12. This is another case where the author of Lamentations 3 is situated in the context of earlier events through the use of a common image. This same image was also used in Lamentations 2:4

[130] When read in dialogue with the parallel passage in Lam. 2:4 there is a particularly sadistic quality to this passage. In the parallel image of YHWH as an archer in 2:4, the root, נצב, has a static quality to it. It is used to depict YHWH as an archer poised with a

14. He shot into my innards
    the shafts of his quiver[132]

15. I became a laughingstock for all my people
    their mocking songs all day long[133].

---

bow pulled taught. The same root,נצב , is found in this verse: "ויציבני". The image conjured can therefore be read as similarly static, of the author being "set"as a static shooting target. This can therefore be read as moving beyond the image of the author as prey, in v. 10 who at least has a fighting chance. In this reading we can imagine the author hog-tied and forcibly set in one place as a target and subjected to the archer's, YHWH's arrows.

[131] The dialogue with the Lamentations text and Job 16 continues. Word and image overlap between these texts. Here in this verse and the next, we find the author set up as a target and fired upon, just as is described in Job 16:12-13, --"וַיְקִימֵנִי לוֹ, לְמַטָּרָה יָסֹבּוּ עָלַי, רַבָּיו יְבַקַּע כִּלְיוֹתַי, וְלֹא יַחְמֹל יִשְׁפֹּךְ לָאָרֶץ, מְרֹרָתִי"; Note that some of the same words are used as well, "מטרה" found in this verse and "כליות" found in the next one, v. 13.

[132] In the Hebrew in v. 12 the word for arrow, חץ, is used. Thus, arrow, though more straightforward, would not be an appropriate rendering of the phrase בני אשפתו. In addition to requiring differentiation from חץ/arrow, the phrase בני אשפתו is more poetic in language and therefore demands a more poetic turn of phrase.

16. He filled me with bitterness,

sated me[134] with wormwood

17. He ground[135] my teeth[136] with gravel,

crushed me[137] in the dust.

---

[133] Juxtaposed with the previous verse, the author has become a target twice, both for physical harm (arrows) and emotional abuse (mocking songs).

[134] As the English implies, this verb typically pertains to positive, nourishing satiety. Even more specifically the word appears as part of a recurring trope of YHWH's promise for future goodness. Such as those found in Is. 55:10 "כִּי כַאֲשֶׁר יֵרֵד הַגֶּשֶׁם וְהַשֶּׁלֶג מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם, וְשָׁמָּה לֹא יָשׁוּב--כִּי אִם-הִרְוָה אֶת-הָאָרֶץ" and Jer. 31:24, "כִּי הִרְוֵיתִי, נֶפֶשׁ עֲיֵפָה; וְכָל-נֶפֶשׁ דָּאֲבָה, מִלֵּאתִי". The noun form is used also to convey overflowing goodness in Ps. 23:5 "כּוֹסִי רְוָיָה". These examples all reinforce the way in which this chapter undermines the prophetic promises made by YHWH and optimistic language found elsewhere in Tanakh.

[135] An uncommon word used in only one other verse, Psalms 119:20 "גָּרְסָה נַפְשִׁי לְתַאֲבָה-- אֶל-מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ בְכָל-עֵת". In Psalm 119, the pious psalmist prays to cleave to divine guidance. Once again, a look at the parallel shows the hopeful message overturned in this verse.

[136] Soundplay, the same consonantal sound of שני is found in the A and B lines with the vocalization inverted.

18. My life rejected well-being,

    I forgot goodness

19. And I thought I have lost my glory

    and my hope from YHWH

20. Remembering[138] my misery and oppression[139]

    wormwood and bitterness

---

[137] Hapax legomenon. This instance represents a recurring phenomenon in Lamentations wherein such a word is used partially to create sound play. This word is part of a sequence starting with the previous hapax legomenon in v. 11 that includes:(17) ויפשחני(11), אשפתו (13), הכפשני (16), נפשי

[138] This captures a powerful but easily overlooked additional dimension to the suffering described in this chapter. Forgetting (3:17) and remembering (3:19) are juxtaposed, separate by merely one verse. In 3:17, it is "goodness" that is forgotten. In 3:19, the author conveys, painfully, that all that is remembered is "misery and oppression, wormwood and bitterness!"

[139] This is another instance of situating the author at the events in the previous chapters. This line quotes the beginning of 1:7 almost verbatim.

21. I surely remember (them) [140]

and my life is laid low upon me.[141]

22. This I bring back to my heart,[142]

therefore I have hope.[143]

---

[140] There is disagreement as to whether this is 2nd m.s. or 3rd f.s. The referent of the former would be YHWH, the latter, נפש. Elsewhere in Lamentations, YHWH is addressed directly, in second person. However, in this sequence of verses YHWH is referred to indirectly, in third person. I find it unlikely that this should switch to a more personal and direct address. For this reason, I opt for the referent as נפש.

[141] The *k'ri*, "תָּשׁוֹחַ " stems from the root שחח defined by HALOT variously as "to crouch" or "have to stoop in humility" or שחה, "bow down" according to HALOT. "Laid low" is an attempt to utilize a verb that resides at the nexus of both definitions, capturing elements of both.

[142] HALOT offers "mind" as one of the subordinate definitions for לב.

[143] This forms an inclusio with the near identical phrase at the end of 3:24. These verses mark a pronounced shift from the pessimism that preceded. Situation the verse within an inclusio set them apart as a kind of title for the section that follows.

23. YHWH's acts of loyalty for they have not ended,[144]
    for His compassion does not cease[145]

24. They are renewed every morning,
    great is your faithfulness.

25. "My portion[146] is YHWH," I say to myself,
    therefore I have hope in Him.

---

[144] I am reading תמנו as 3rd m.pl. even if the form is confounding. This reading is influenced by Hillers (pp. 56-57), who understands the *nun* as a product of the assimilated double *mem* of the root תמם.

[145] The same verb is used in 2:11. There is refers to tears which do not cease – brought on by suffering from YHWH. This verse overturns that image, by replacing it with YHWH's compassion which does not cease.

[146] Berlin (pp.93-94) clarifies the idea of "My portion is YHWH." The notion of having a portion with reference to a king is to acknowledge the king's sovereignty, as in Deut. 32:9 "כִּי חֵלֶק יְהוָה, עַמּוֹ". Therefore, to make sure a statement in the context of a post-destruction/exilic reality is to reject the sovereignty of the Babylonian King. It is to say that YHWH alone is king.

26. Good is YHWH to those who wait for Him,

    to the one who seeks Him.

27. Good, for he hopes in silence[147]

    for YHWH's deliverance

28. Good for a man

    that he bears a yoke[148] in his youth

29. He should sit[149] alone and be silent,

    for He put it upon him.

---

[147] Even though it is "hopes and silence," this is a hendiadys. The force of the pairing is "silently hopes." I use "hopes in silence" in order to preserve the Hebrew syntax.

[148] Here and in the surrounding verses, images and words from earlier in the book recur. There is ironic inversion, once again, though in this instance for good. We find על (1:14), בדד (1:1), דומם/וידם (2:10 – ידמו), dust in the mouth (3:16), all elements used to cause or convey suffering are now signs of humility, indications of piety (Berlin p.94).

[149] This and the following two verses begin with a jussive form in the 3rd m.s. Following Berlin who preserves this pattern by beginning each of these three verses with "e."

30. He should put his mouth in the dust,
    perhaps there is hope.

31. He should offer his cheek to the one who strikes him,
    let him have his fill of scorn[150].

32. For YHWH will not reject forever

33. For if He has made one suffer,
    then He will have compassion as befits His vast[151] loyalty.

34. For He does not deliberately afflict
    or make human beings suffer.

---

[150] Capturing the sense of שבע as satisfied, while also striving to maintain consistency with its use above (3:15) as "full." Therefore rendering "have his fill" which implies that it is just as much as he can take, as opposed to "let him be full." The latter carries an implication that he should be fully shamed, even to a point that is more than he can take.

[151] "Abundant" is the better translation and it squares with HALOT, but it does not suit the noun "loyalty" as a modifier in English. Berlin uses "vast" which fits better with loyalty and has the same meaning.

35. By crushing underfoot

all the prisoners of the earth

36. By perverting a man's justice

in the presence of the face of the Most High.

37. By subverting[152] a person in his case,

the Lord does not see it?

38. Who is it who spoke and it came to be? [153]

the Lord did not command it!?

---

[152] While HALOT defines this word as "perverting" it doesn't work idiomatically in English. This would also be a misleading translation as "perverting" is used to render "להטות"in the previous verse. Berlin uses subverting which works and has the same sense.

[153] This verse is in dialogue with Ps. 33:9 ״כִּי הוּא אָמַר וַיֶּהִי הוּא-צִוָּה וַיַּעֲמֹד״. The language of the verse from Psalms is replicated faithfully. Unlike previous citations of Psalms in this chapter, there is no inversion of the language or message. Thus, as befits the more faithful and pious tone of this section of the chapter, Psalms is now referenced and affirmed.

39. Is it not from the mouth of the Most High
    that come bad things[154] and the good

40. Why should a living person complain,
    a man over his sins[155]

41. Let us seek our ways and examine them,
    and let us return to YHWH.

42. Let us bear[156] our hearts up with our hands,
    up to YHWH[157] in the heavens.

---

[154] A plural noun capturing bad "things," not evil in general. Meanwhile the parallel noun for good is in the singular form. This implies that it is referring to good writ large, goodness. It also resonates with the thrice repeated "טוב" in vv. 25-27. This imbalance between "bad things" and "the good" also implies a greater role for YHWH on the side of goodness. Bad things may happen because of YHWH, but YHWH does not create evil.

[155] Though not reflected in the English, the verb "complain" applies to both parts of the verse. There is therefore a general comment about complaining followed by a more specific one. First why should anyone alive complain, in general. Second, (and especially) why should a man complain over his sins?

43. We have revolted and rebelled,

You have not forgiven.

44. You covered[158] Yourself[159] in wrath and pursued us,

You killed and had no pity[160]

---

[156] The same verb is used in 3:27 for bearing a load. Its use again here is intentional. This verse is in dialogue with 3:27. It creates a connection between bearing a yoke in youth and the capacity to lift up one's heart.

[157] As opposed to the name of YHWH in the form of the tetragrammaton, this is the noun meaning "YHWH."

[158] This is a deeply ironic inversion of an image usually used in reference to divine presence. This is the description used for the cherubs. Their wings protect the ark in Ex. 25:20, "וְהָיוּ הַכְּרֻבִים פֹּרְשֵׂי כְנָפַיִם לְמַעְלָה, סֹכְכִים בְּכְנָפֵיהֶם עַל-הַכַּפֹּרֶת" (also described in Ex. 37:9). Furthermore, YHWH's presence manifests in the space between those wings, in Ex. 25:22, "וְנוֹעַדְתִּי לְךָ, שָׁם, וְדִבַּרְתִּי אִתְּךָ מֵעַל הַכַּפֹּרֶת מִבֵּין שְׁנֵי הַכְּרֻבִים". Now this covering does

45. You covered Yourself in clouds[161]

that no prayer may pass through.[162]

---

the opposite. It is distancing, it is composed of wrath, and ensures YHWH's merciless killing.

[159] This is no explicit noun to indicate who is covered, the verse is purposely vague. Hillers translates it as the people who are covered. This rendering of the people as the one's being covered is possible, but forced. For the sake of translation a choice of just whom is being covered must be made. Thus, YHWH covering YHWH's-self is preferred. It aligns with the ironic inversion that traces through the rest of the work. YHWH, who usually offers sheltering protection, instead shelter and protects YHWH's-self from YHWH's people. This reading also matches the next verse, which is parallel and does have something akin to "yourself" in the pronoun לך.

[160] Once again there is a recurrence of the combination of destructive force with "no pity" found repeteadly in chapter 2, vv. 2, 17, & 21

[161] There is further ironic inversion here. The cloud image which usually signifies divine protection, Ex. 13:21, 14:19-24, now signifies the blocking of access to YHWH. The cloud creates distance, a barrier, between the people and YHWH. It is almost as if YHWH needs protection from people.

[162] Earlier verse, 3:8, also conveys the idea that YHWH kept out the people's cries/prayers.

46. You have made us sweepings and trash[163]
amidst the peoples.

47. They opened[164] their mouths against us,
all of our enemies.

48. Panic and pitfall[165] were ours,
desolation and devastation.[166]

49. Steams of water fall from my eyes,[167]
on account of the devastation of my dear people.

---

[163] Berlin suggests that this is a hendiadys, reading it as “disgusting filth.”

[164] The same phrase was used in 2:16, once again, tying the author of this chapter to events in previous chapters.

[165] Following Berlin’s translation as it works linguistically and replicates the alliteration of the double *pey* so well (though admittedly it’s a *fey* in the second verb).

[166] Following Berlin here too, though it is not possible to replicate the *shin* sounds, she replicates the alliterative quality here as well.

[167] Ps. 119:136, has almost the same exact phrase, "פַּלְגֵי-מַיִם, יָרְדוּ עֵינָי". Is this a commentary on the author, is he among those who do not follow the law for whom the

50. My eyes gush forth and do not stop

without respite.[168]

51. Until He looks down,

and let YHWH see from the heavens.

52. My eyes have brought me grief[169]

more than the daughters of my city

53. They have surely hunted me,

my enemies - like a bird, for nothing

---

psalmist cries? Alternatively, is this a critique of the psalmist's judgmental approach toward others? Or is it a third path, identifying the author with the psalmist?

[168] Hapax legomenon. This word seems closely related to פוגת in 2:18, they share a similar meaning and a similar context of unending tears.

[169] This is a difficult verse. I suggest that perhaps YHWH in v. 50 is bearing witness to what the author himself sees in v. 51, and what he sees is so terrible that it brings him great grief.

54. They have silenced my life in a pit

they cast stones down at me

55. They flooded[170] water down upon my head

I said I am cut off

56. I called out your name, o YHWH

from the deepest pit.[171]

---

[170] There are two verses where this verb is used. One of them, Deut. 11:4 is enlightening.

"וַאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְחֵיל מִצְרַיִם לְסוּסָיו וּלְרִכְבּוֹ, אֲשֶׁר הֵצִיף אֶת-מֵי יַם-סוּף עַל-פְּנֵיהֶם"

The Egyptian charioteers are flooded with water and drown, so there is a shared sense of being overwhelmed and drowning. This verse serves as a counterpoint as, unlike the Egyptians, the author both calls out to YHWH and he receives assistance.

[171] This verse and the one that follows are parallel in meaning both thematically and semantically (it is not lexically identical, but the meaning is the same merely synonymous words are used) to Ps. 130 1-2:

130:1 "שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת מִמַּעֲמַקִּים קְרָאתִיךָ יְהוָה"

130:2 "אֲדֹנָי שִׁמְעָה בְקוֹלִי תִּהְיֶינָה אָזְנֶיךָ קַשֻּׁבוֹת לְקוֹל תַּחֲנוּנָי"

Looking at the parallel texts in psalms is helpful for understanding vv. 55 & 56 which are linguistically and grammatically difficult.

57. You hear my voice[172]

do not cover up your ears to my plea for relief,[173] to my cry for help.

58. Come near on the day I call you,

say, “Do not fear.”

59. Plead for me, my Lord, in the case for my soul,

redeem my life.

---

[172] From this verse to the end (vv. 56-66) Berlin and Hillers translate the “precative perfect.”

In “An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax” Bruce K. Walke (p.494) describes this perfect as a conjugation used to express a prayer, hoping to be fulfilled. Identifying that precative perfect is mostly contextual, but a Walke notes that a good indicator is a mixture of perfect and imperfect in the context of an individual addressing YHWH.

[173] This is a somewhat strange usage, given that HALOT defines this word as “relief.” Berlin’s suggestion that there is an implicit plea asking for relief is convincing, particularly given the immediate aural context of covering up ears. The noun is used in only one other verse, Ex. 8:11, so it is not as if there is broad textual precedent for one definition over another.

60. You see, YHWH, my oppression[174],

judge my justice.

61. You see all their vengeance,

all their plots against me.

62. You hear[175] their scorn, o YHWH,

all their plots against me

63. Their lips rise against me

their muttering[176] against me all day long

[174] This is a hapax legomenon which HALOT defines as oppression. It seems related to "לעות" in v. 36 and shares a judicial context as well.

[175] This marks a very clear, even obvious, shift from sight to hearing. The previous two verses begin with “see” this verse begins with “hear.”

[176] This word is rare, it appears in only 3 other verse, all in Psalms: 9:17, 19:15, and 92:4. All three have a positive message. Once again, the message of Psalms is inverted through its use here in a negative context.

64. When they sit or when they rise,

look! I am their taunt-song[177]

65. Return to them with their recompense, YHWH,

as befits their handiwork

66. Give them anguish[178] of heart

you curse upon them.

67. Purse them in wrath and wipe them out[179]

from under YHWH's heavens.

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[177] While this is a hapax legomenon, it is very similar to נגינתם in 3:14 and seems to have a similar meaning of a derisive, insulting song. Its use also allows for sound play with הגיון in the previous verse.

[178] Hapax legomenon. Berlin (p.83) suggests that this word is rooted in גנן which is "cover" or perhaps מגן, shield. Both semantic connections imply the quality of hardness. This "hardness of heart" in turn leads to anguish.

[179] HALOT defines the *hif* of שמד as "exterminate." As with כלה in the previous chapter (2:22) the word "exterminate" does not work with the line; it is too cold and clinical. I therefore follow Hillers and translate "תַּשְׁמִידֵם" as "wipe them out." I recognize that this rendering is misleading, as it gives the impression that the same Hebrew word is used both here and in 2:22. However, what is gained is an emphasis on the close connection

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between the final verse in chapters 2 and 3. As has been previously observed, the linguistic and thematic connection between this chapter and the previous two can be observed throughout this chapter. In this final instance, ch. 2 is overturned by ch. 3. While in ch. 2 the author's countrymen are being wiped out, in this verse, the author calls upon the enemy to be wiped out. Both chapters end on a note of utter destruction, "extermination."

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