# A STRUCTURAL AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE MIDRASH EIKHAH RABBAH

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

One would assume that reading the midrash on Lamentations would be a study in the rabbinic view of hopelessness and helplessness. Indeed, while working on this project I have frequently been asked why I chose such a depressing topic. However, my selection of Eikhah Rabbah was due to the surprising nature of this work.

I first read Eikhah Rabbah in search of material for use in a service commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Kristallnacht. This midrash seemed an obvious choice since it was based on the destruction of the Temples. Were there ancient words that could convey the modern nightmare of the Jewish people? The answer was 'no' for a surprising reason. I was reading the midrash in search of lament and anguish. What I discovered was a range of feelings that included despair, but was ultimately conquered by perseverance, hope and even humor.

As is the purpose of so many midrashim, Eikhah Rabbah provides a measure of comfort to what at one time was considered the most tragic event in Jewish history. Moreso, this midrash reveals the shaping of memories and dreams.

The little scholarly research that has been undertaken concerning Eikhah Rabbah has concentrated on the historical aspects of the work. That is to say, when was the midrash compiled, where, and by how many hands? How accurate are the facts presented in the midrash? How do portions of the text compare with parallel works?

The major work on the subject was done by Solomon Buber. His text of Eikhah Rabbah is based on a number of printed texts dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth century.[1] Buber's work incorporates manuscripts dating as far back as the thirteenth century.[2] Contrastingly, the Soncino translation of the midrash appears to be based solely on the printed text.[3] The differences between Buber and Soncino are due to Buber's use of the manuscript material.

The midrash itself is an exegetical work. The book of Lamentations is interpreted verse by verse and at times word by word. The languages used in the midrash are Hebrew and Aramaic, at times within the same sentence. In addition, Greek loan words are commonly used.

Eikhah Rabbah is commonly dated to fifth century CE Palestine. This is suggested by Buber in his Introduction and has been accepted by other scholars as well.[4] Leopold Zunz dated it to the latter half of the seventh century, a suggestion repeated recently by Shaye J. D. Cohen.[5]

Recent works on Eikhah Rabbah have taken two approaches. The first is to focus on the historical events mentioned in the midrash, such as the siege of Jerusalem, and to test the accuracy of this material. Yitzchak Baer has used this method to show the development of aggadic material in the midrash as has Anthony J. Saldarini.[6] Jacob Neusner draws on material in the text to help recreate a biography of Yohanan ben Zakkai.[7]

The second focused concern centers on the nature of the midrash as a whole. That is, which portions of Eikhah Rabbah are original, and which are later additions. As Zunz points out, the first chapter of the midrash comprises most of the work, the rest of the chapters contain repetitions, and by the fifth chapter, the text is very meager.[8] There is also the question of how the proems relate to the rest of the work. Were any of them original? If so, how many? When were the proems added to the midrash? Here, too, research has dealt with an attempt to trace the proems to a source.[9]

This paper investigates the midrash Eikhah Rabbah in a literary manner through the themes, images and structure of the text. The key questions include, is there a thematic development that reveals an editorial hand? What are the prevalent images used in the midrash and how are they utilized? What other techniques are used to convey the message of the text? Who was the intended audience? Is there an overall objective to this midrash?

Beyond the purview of this investigation are answers to questions concerning dating, tradents, or the accuracy of the historical material mentioned in the text. Ideally, this research will provide insight into the writer(s)/redactor(s) method and purpose in shaping the text.

This thesis deals in the main with the proems and Chapter One of Eikhah Rabbah. Together, these comprise about half the

book. The first part concerning the proems is divided into two sections.

The former section is an overview exploring the question of thematic development in the proems. Themes are made evident in a number of ways including: a) through the subject matter of a particular proem, b) through the images used, c) through the prooftexts chosen for the piece, and d) through the choice of words and use of puns. Additionally, this first section will address the issue of which proems might be original to the text.

The latter section of this unit consists of textual analysis of selected proems. By examining differing proems in detail, this section will attempt to show how the thematic elements fit together in the individual proem as well as throughout the proems as a whole.

The second part of this work concentrates on Chapter One of the midrash. Chapter One contains more variables than the proems and these various factors will be treated separately.

The first section will detail recurring themes and images appearing in Chapter One, a number of which are unique to this work. If and where possible, parallels with the proems will be discussed.

The second section deals with a crucial stylistic aspect of Chapter One: the anecdotes. These stories constitute a major part of Chapter One. They also are a major influence on tone and imagery of the chapter. These anecdotes are an enigmatic key to

many elements of Eikhah Rabbah Chapter One including its message, audience and redaction.

The third section investigates possible historical references appearing in the text. In addition to summarizing previous material, this section looks at specific problems in the text that may provide clues concerning redaction.

The fourth section deals with the use of biblical verses in chapter one. This is a twofold examination on: a) the use of prooftexts in general and b) the use of Lamentations verses. The major question in this section is what liberties are taken with the text to fit the purpose of midrash?

The final section is a detailed textual analysis of specific verses from Chapter One. The verses selected for this section are taken from groupings at the beginning, middle and end of Chapter One. These selected verses will be used to illustrate the structural elements in Chapter One, its thematic emphasis and flow.

## Notes to the Introduction

1. Solomon Buber, "Introduction," Midrash Eikhah, Vilna, (1899), p. 77. The first printed editions Buber mentions include Pisaro 1534 CE and Constantinople 1535 CE.

2. Buber, "Forward," pp. 1-2; "Introduction," pp. 73-7. The major manuscript is from a collection called 'Casanata J. I. 4' According to Buber, the last page of the manuscript is identified as being from Castiolione, dated 1378 CE. The proems are from a manuscript in the British Museum, number 27089. It is dated to 1504 CE. In addition to these are a number of other manuscripts fragments from Parma, one from Munich, and one from the Vatican.

3. This opinion is based on a comparison of the Buber and Soncino versions. There are a number of variations between these two editions. The Soncino material follows what is presented in Buber's notes as being the printed version of the midrash.

4. Buber, "Introduction," p. 9. The dating is based on the tradents and language appearing in the text.

5. See Leopold Zunz, Die Gottesdienstlischen Vorträge der Juden Historisch Entwickelt, Hebrew translation by Albeck, Haderashot B'Yisrael, Jerusalem, (1954), p. 79. See also Shaye J. D. Cohen, "The Destruction: From Scripture to Midrash," Prooftexts, v. 2, (1982), p. 19, where he places the midrash "sometime between the fifth and seventh centuries."

6. See Yitzchak Baer, "Yerushalayim Bimey Hamered Hagadol," Zion, v. 36, (1971), pp. 127-190. See also Anthony J. Saldarini, "Johanan Ben Zakkai's Escape from Jerusalem," Journal for the Study of Judaism, v. 6, (1975), pp. 189-204.

7. See Jacob Neusner, Development of a Legend: Studies on the Tradition concerning Yohanan ben Zakkai, Leiden, (1970).

8. Zunz, Gottesdientlichen, p. 79.

9. Buber does this in his Introduction, pp. 10-20. Other attempts include Menachem Zulai, "Piyyut Qadmon vehaPetikhot de-Eikhah Rabbati," Tarbitz, 16, (1945) pp. 190-5.

# PART ONE

# THE PROEMS OF EIKHAH RABBAH

## SECTION ONE

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROEMS

The proems of Eikhah Rabbah, at face value, follow the traditional style of beginning with an extraneous verse and connecting this verse to the beginning of the book of Lamentations. The printed edition of the midrash contains 34 proems, Buber has divided this into 36, based mainly on the Casanata and British Museum manuscripts with which he dealt. The additional proems are found in proems 2 and 31. There have been other opinions on dividing the proems as well, with Abrahams suggesting 38 proems.[1] The accepted number of 36 proems corresponds to the numerical value of eikhah. Using the numerical value of this word would be in keeping with elements that appear in Chapter 1:1, such as Israel's transgressing the thirty-six ordinances of the Torah.

The order of the proems has been questioned as well. The accepted explanation is that the proems are grouped according to tradents. These groups begin with the rabbis having more proems attributed to them to those with only a single proem. Two questions arise from this: 1) what is used to determine the order of the latter proems that are one per rabbi, and 2) what is done with the divided proems that carry no attribution at the outset? Another possiblity is that the redactor was playing an alphabet game with some of the proems. Taking the names of the rabbis in the first 21 proems yields the sound "eikhah" although the spelling is inaccurate 'yh'.[2] The argument falls apart with the

rest of the proems.

It is impossible to determine whether the proems were original the midrash. There are some proems that are evidently drawn from other sources. In his notes, Buber shows parallels to Pesikta deRav Kahana in the first four proems alone. There are parallels as well in proems 9 and 25. In addition, there are parallels with other midrashic works including Ruth Rabbah (proem 10), Esther Rabbah (proem 10), Song of Songs Rabbah (proem 12) and Ecclesiastes Rabbah (proems 22 and 23).[3] The proems also share material with the body of the midrash.[4] In Buber's notes to the proems, he shows similarities with various yalkutim, further strengthening the argument that the proems were a later addition. For example, Yalkut Isaiah and Yalkut Ezekiel are mentioned in reference to proem 5 (note 5). Yalkut Jeremiah is given as a reference to proem 8 (note 1). While he claims not to know the origin of 19 of the proems, he does not speculate as to whether any proems were original to this midrash.[5]

Overall, the proems carry the same themes as the midrash, and at times use the same imagery as well.[6] Israel's role in the covenant, and the inherent tension of this role, play a part in the first four proems as well as in the first chapter. The image of the golden calf appears in the proems (12 and 13) as well as in thebody of the work.

The overall theme of sin and exile is most obvious in the emandation at the end of the proems: "since they sinned they were exiled." The ending leading to the first verse of Lamentations is forced in many cases. Thematically, or in terms of imagery, the

words "Since they sinned they were exiled," or "eikhah", do not develop from the proem itself. There are also a few proems that lack this ending entirely, though this does not mean they were not among the original proems. A summary of the proems ending with "since they sinned" and/or "eikhah" may be illustrated as follows:

| No such ending | ending original | emandation |
|---|---|---|
| 7 (Lam. 2:10) | 1 | 5 |
| 16 (Ps. 73:26) | 2A | 6 |
| 24 (Jer. 31:16) | 2B | 8 |
| 25 (Jer. 13:17) | 3 | 9 (occurs 2x) |
| 28 (Jer. 36:2) | 4 | 13 |
| 34 (Ezek. 36:34) | 10 | 14 |
| | 11 | 18 (diff. end) |
| | 15 | 21 |
| | 17 | 22 |
| | 19 (pun!) | 26 |
| | 20 | 30 (Lam. 4:12) |
| | 27 | 31A |
| | 29 | 33 |
| | 31B | |

Proems 23 and 32 are left out because a determination is more difficult to make with these. In both cases, the proems can stand without the Lam. 1:1 verse, but the verse also fits well into the structure of these proems. Proem 30 appears verbatim in chapter 4:12. Proem 7, an exposition of Lam 2:10, does not appear

in that chapter. Perhaps it was an introduction to this verse, or is a remnant from another version of the midrash. Proem 16 contains a reference to Lam 4:4 but there is no similar material in the body of the midrash.

Within the order of the proems there is no development of an overwhelming theme. There is, however, a relationship in theme and/or imagery between small groups of proems:

1. Listen to Torah
2A. Foresake Torah (1 & 2A: opposites images)
2B. Lament (no connection to 2A or 3)
3. Not transgress covenant
4. Transgress covenant (3 and 4 are opposites)
   Image: Descendants going into Israel (4 & 5: opposite images)
5. Image: Descendants going into exile
   Image: Tribes going into exile
6. Image: Tribes going into exile
7. Laments
8. Laments
   Ending similar to 9
9. Ending similar to 8
10. Serving God
11. Serving God
    Transgression
12. Transgression
    Image: Golden calf, Ex. 32:4, Prov. 25:20
13. Image: Golden calf, idolatry, Ex. 32:4, Prov. 25:18-19
14. Israel goes too far against enemies

"Whoever judges a fool is judged"

15. "He that corrects a scoffer is shamed"
16. God distances from wicked
17. Wickedness of people

    Image: 9 Av
18. Image: 9 Av
19. results of being worthy or unworthy
20. Israel united and divided

    God is solitary

    Aural structure: roof to roof (20 - 22: aural relation)
21. Aural structure: house to house

    Idolatry
22. Idolatry, change of location

    Aural structure: house to house, to roof, etc.
23. From greatness to destruction and exile

    together with, apart from God.
24. From destitution to greatness to destitution

    cry
25. 10 journeys of the **Shekhinah**

    Sound: roof to roof

    United and divided (proem 20)

    Hezekiah, angels (proem 24)
26. Downfall of Jerusalem and destruction
27. Israel not punished without warning

    Image: book of Lamentations, alphabet, # 7
28. Image: book of Lamentations, alphabet
29. Together and apart from God (proem 23)

30. Four kings, Nebuchadnezzar in Jerusalem

31A. God appreciates Israel when exiled

31B. Israel needs more reproach than others (Opposite of 31A)

32. Meaning of "weep" (proem 24)

33. Weeping on 9 Av

34. Weeping, prophecy of destruction and return

Image: # 7 (proem 27)

Themes and images appear in one proem and reappear elswhere. This list makes evident that there is some grouping based on themes, images, even verses, but this is not maintained throughout the entire body of the proems. Instead, it is as though the proems were beads put on a string in small amounts. Some carry relevance to one or two other proem (4-6, 7-9, 10-13, 32-34). One group, proems 20-25, comes close to developing a structure of theme, images and language. Still other proems stand alone (2A, 26, 29, 30).

The proems of Eikhah Rabbah leave one with more questions than answers. Though no firm conclusions can be drawn, some tentative thoughts can be offered. As has been stated by many scholars, the proems, having numerous parallels in subsequent midrashim, are later than the body of the Eikhah Rabbah. Their inclusion does not necessarily mean that they were originally intended for the purpose of introducing this midrash. Some are self-contained works, such as proem 23. Others may have at one time been spoken introductions for use on holidays, such as the ones mentioning the Ninth of Av. Still others may have been introductions to talks about Lamentations.[7] Here too, it is

impossible to say who the intended audience was. By the level of the material, it is safe to guess that the listeners were a learned elite, so familiar with the Bible that they could readily grasp the themes and images only hinted at in the prooftext.[8]

The impression left by these proems, which vary in length and style, is that they originally served different purposes and the redactor made them into proems in this compilation. If they appear elsewhere in the midrash, so be it. The intent of the redaction might have been to collect all possible works on the subject. Editing may have been an inclusive process, a filing system, subconsciously shaping the material by organizing it in small groups based on theme, image, or language.

## SECTION TWO

## AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED PROEMS

### A. Proem 5

The fifth proem of Eikhah Rabbah begins with a petihta by R. Abbahu in the name of R. Yose bar Ḥaninah. The proemial text is Ezek. 24:6, "Therefore, thus said Adonai, woe to the city of blood, a pot whose filth is in it, whose filth has not gone out of it, take it out piece by piece." Each section of this verse is interpreted, with portions translated into Aramaic, perhaps indicating a relatively older portion of the midrash. The "city of blood" is explained in Aramaic as being the city where blood is shed. "Filth" is translated into Aramaic as hafshushitey.[1] "Piece by piece" is interpreted as referring to the method in which the exile occured.

The next part, brought in the names of R. Eliezer and R. Shmuel ben Naḥman continues with an inquiry of how the exile occurred. First the question of "how were they exiled" is raised in Hebrew. R. Eliezer maintains that the tribes of Reuven and Gad were exiled first, while R. Shmuel bar Naḥman claims it was the tribes of Zevulun and Naftali. For this he uses the prooftext, "The first dishonored the land of Zevulun and the land of Naftali" (Isa. 8:23).[2] Finally, R. Eliezer reconciles the two opinions, concentrating on Isa. 8:23 ka'et harishon (as at the first instance). In R. Eliezer's opinion, as the first two tribes were

exiled, so were the next two, Zevulun and Naftali. The next argument continues with the Isaiah verse, "the latter was dealt a more serious blow." This is explained through a pun on hikhbid, makhbid, taken to be a broom. The prooftext of Isa. 14:23 completes the image of being swept by a "broom of extermination."[3]

The proem continues with the midrash on Ezek. 24:6, and follows with vss. 24:7-11. As at the beginning the midrash develops a phrase by phrase interpretation of the verses. Now that the question of how Israel was exiled has been answered, the next question is why was she exiled. R. Nahman in the name of R. Aha provides the answer in explaining "no lot has befallen it," (Ezek. 24:6). In his explanation, though God cast lots exiling the nations, they were not exiled; however, Israel was exiled. The reason comes from Ezek. 24:7-8, "for her blood was within her" and "that it may stir up My wrath."

This sin of "blood" is made clear by the next section of the proem. The blood refers to the murder of Zekhariah.[4] The sin is compounded because Zekhariah was killed in the court of priests according to the proem. Not only that, but the blood was not covered with dust (Ezek. 24:7-8) as would be proper with a sacrifice (Lev 17:13).[5] This apparently provokes God's anger and He decides to increase the fire of destruction (Ezek. 24:9).

Ezek. 24:10 is used to detail the method of punishment: God "piles on the logs," is taken to be the unidentified enemy's legions; he "lights the fire," meaning He encourages the foreign kings in their endeavor; the "meat is well cooked," refers to the exile of the community; "the broth is emptied," alludes to

the exile. A further elaboration is brought in concerning Nebuchadnezzar. Though he did not need Israel's wealth, God made him desire it, thereby 'emptying the broth' into exile.[6] "The bones are charred," refers to Israel's condition at the moment of exile. According to the midrash, their bodies were boiling, possibly an allusion to their emotional state.

The proem concludes with Ezek. 24:11, "set it empty on coals that it may heat up, its copper may burn and its filth may be melted and consumed." R. Eliezer uses this verse to end on a note of hope.[7] The pot (Jerusalem) is empty, not broken. Every empty pot gets refilled in the future. The exile represents a cleansing, Jerusalem is being prepared for redemption.

The proem ends with the phrase, "Since they sinned, they were exiled, and since they were exiled, Jeremiah began to lament over them 'How sitteth solitary.'"[8] This ending negates the message of R. Eliezer's closing statement. It is a later addition to the proem, making it conform to the collection of material presented in Eikhah Rabbah.[9]

Proem 5 serves the purpose of answering the how, why and how long of exile. The imagery of the proem mimics the imagery found in the Ezekiel text. In Ezek. 24:2 the king of Babylon besieges Jerusalem. As the text itself states, the verses that follow are an allegory of the destruction, which is carried out by God, and the reasons for it. The only verse the proem interprets differently is verse 11, "set it empty upon the coals that it may heat up, its copper may burn and its filth may be melted and consumed." This verse is viewed as a message of hope in the

proem, whereas the biblical text presents it as being complete destruction.

Proem 5 fits within a small grouping of proems. It ties in to proem 4 because both proems deal with transgression and exile. Proem 4 discusses the transgressions of Adam and the Children of Israel; proem 5 is concerned with the tribes and Jerusalem. While proem 4 uses the image of the burning sword as the protector of Judaism, proem 5 concludes with the cleansing aspect of the fire burning the pot.[10] Proem 6 is concerned with the tribes as well, also raising the point that the exile took place in sections.

## B. Proem 11

The theme of this proem is made clear at the very beginning, where R. Yitshak introduces the proem using Deut. 28:47-8: "Because you did not serve Adonai your God with joy and gladness over the abundance of everything, you will serve...the enemies whom Adonai will release against you." The proem develops this theme using the verses of the first chapter of Eikhah Rabbah. These are compared to a number of verses from other texts. The message of the proem is structurally shaped through the repeated contrasting of the verses: "Had you been worthy, you would have read in the Torah..." "but now that you are unworthy you read..."[1]

The Lamentations verses are presented in reverse order. The connection between the Lamentations verse and the verse from the contrasting text is usually one word. For example, in the comparison of Lam. 1:22 and Ex. 15:17, the common word is "to come." In Lam. 1:22 it is tav'o, in Ex. 15:17 it is tavi'aimo. The connection is clearer in the next verse Lam 1:21 and Ex. 15:14, where the common word is sham'u (heard). The midrash develops in this way, trying to maintain the connecting word as having the preceding letter of the alphabet (from tav to aleph). This method works at the outset in Lam. 1:22 through 1:17 and it is picked up again with Lam. 1:1 at the very end.

Along the way, as is typical in such structures, this reverse alphabetical development falls apart, beginning with the contrast of Lam. 1:17 and Deut. 15:11. The common word should

begin with the letter "pay." While both prooftexts begin with this letter,[2] the common word in the verse is yad (hand). In Lam. 1:16 and Lev 23:4 the common word is 'lh, though it should be a word beginning with an ʿayin. Similarly, in Lam. 1:13 and Lev. 6:6, the common word is 'esh (fire). Lam. 1:11 and Lev. 26:5 provide lehem (bread) while Lam. 1:10 and Ex. 34:24 share hmd (covet). The contrast between Lam 1:5 and Deut. 28:13 is provided by ler'osh (at the head), while in Lam. 1:2 and Ex. 12:42 the common word is leyl (night).

There are three occasions when a common word is not used in the comparison of prooftexts. The first occurance is Lam 1:9 and Lev. 16:30. The verses quoted provide words that begin with the same letter but are opposites: letaher (to cleanse) in Lev. 16:30 and tum'atah (her filth) in Lam. 1:9. Opposites are employed in Lam. 1:3 and Lev. 26:5 as well. The contrast is between exile in Lam. 1:3 (galtah) and dwelling in the land (veyashavtem) in Lev. 26:5. The midrash abandons the alphabetical order in this comparison. The weakest connection between prooftexts is provided by Lam. 1:4 and Deut. 16:16. Here the contrast is provided solely by imagery: a holiday pilgrimage to Jerusalem in Deut. and Jerusalem desolate on holidays in Lam.

There are also connections between verses not being contrasted with each other, indicating the development of imagery. Lam. 1:18 picks up on makh'ovav (affliction) Ex. 3:7 (used to contrast Lam. 1:20). Mayim (water) in Lam. 1:16 also makes an appearance in the next prooftext, Num. 20:19. In addition, Lev 23:4 (used to contrast Lam. 1:16) shares a phrase

with Lam. 1:15: tikre'u 'otam mo'adim, (declare in their appointed seasons) in Lev. 23:4 and kar'a 'alay mo'ed (declared a solemn assembly) in Lam. 1:15. Finally, Lam. 1:8 and 1:9 share the same contrasting prooftext, Lev. 16:30.

Since this proem concentrates on individual contrastive words, there is not a systematic thematic development. Mitsvot appear as a motif at times (Lam. 1:17, 14 and 11), as do holidays (Lam. 1:16, 9 and 4). The contrasting of prooftexts in this proem is also used in the body of Eikhah Rabbah, for example, in chapter 1:22. Perhaps in both the proems and Chapter One there is an attempt to develop a message through the tension presented in the contrasting words.

The message of this proem is that serving God is rewarded while transgression is punished. This theme is alluded to rather than stated outright. Still, this proem serves as a bridge between proems 10 and 12. Proem 10 focusses on serving God, while proem 12 deals with transgressions; proem 11, albeit superficially, incorporates both elements.

### C. Proem 12

R. Hanina bar Papa begins this proem with Prov. 25:20, "As one who takes off a garment on a cold day, as vinegar on nitre, so is the one who sings songs to a burdened heart." At the outset, the image of the garment is employed to compare the behavior of the tribes.[3] Here the garment is used to represent

both the negative (idolatry) and the positive (kingship and priesthood) that is being stripped from Israel.[4] The removal of the garment is repeated later in the name of R. Simon.

Israel's idolatry is responsible for her present state. This is made clear by the puns on 'cold' (qarah). In the first example the idol-worshipping tribes rip (qar'u) the garment. In the second case, they call out (qar'u) to the golden calf.[5] The pun is developed later on with the prooftext from Zech. 7:13: God cries out (qar'a) and was not heard, so, too, the people will call out (yiqre'u), but will not be heard.

The puns continue to develop the imagery of idolatry. Explaining the phrase "vinegar on nitre," R. Joshua bar Nehemiah says that as vinegar dissolves nitre (vesotro) so, too, the people have contradicted Torah (satru). R. Abba bar Qahana compares the people to a cow chewing with her mouth, reviving the image of the golden calf.

The word "mouth" connects this portion of the midrash to the next one drawing on the phrase, "so is the one who sings songs to a burdened heart." The very first example deals with those who would not listen to the truth (God? Torah?) but criticized the prophecies with their mouths. The midrash then brings in a number of prooftexts to show what exactly was prophecied : the immediate destruction of the rebellious, followed by specifics of the hurban (destruction).[6]

The next section, attributed to R. Pinḥas in the name of R. Hoshe'a, uses Isa. 1:21 to infer that there were 480 synagogues in Jerusalem. This is done through gematria on the word ml'ty

(full of).[7] The beauty of the city is then elaborated. Each synagogue contained different schools, and all were destroyed by Vespasian. The climax is a continuation of the prooftext from II Kings 25:9, which alludes to the destruction of Yoḥanan ben Zakkai's school.

The proem ends with the standard phrase, "since they sinned..." Here, too, this phrase is a later addition to conform to the text.

Proem 12 contains many of the elements found in chapter one of Eikhah Rabbah. There is the theme of idolatry/infidelity raised in a number of ways, as well as the image of the garment. There is the the stylistic description used to show how lively the city was: there were so many buildings, each building had so many attachments.[8] Finally, there is mention of Yoḥanan ben Zakkai. Because of the inclusion of Yoḥanan ben Zakkai, it is apparent that the purpose of this proem is to lead up to an incident involving him.[9] Because of all the similarities to chapter one, it would be tempting to say that this proem is original to Eikhah Rabbah. However because of the focus on Yoḥanan ben Zakkai, not Lamentations, the conclusion that must be drawn is that the proem is a later addition. The original source can only be guessed at.[10]

As with the previous proems, proem 12 also ties in with the proems in its proximity. Both proem 11 and 12 deal with transgressions. Proem 13 has a number of connections to proem 12. Proem 12 opens with Prov. 25:20; proem 13 begins with Prov. 25:18 and goes on to vss. 19-20. Both proems deal with idolatry,

the golden calf, and specifically use as prooftext Ex. 32:4. They also share Zech. 7; proem 12 has vs. 13, proem 13 uses vs. 12.

## D. Proem 24

Proem 24, together with proem 23 represent the longest proems in Eikhah Rabbah.[1] Proem 24 is a midrash on Isa. 22:1-12. Isa 22:1 begins "Concerning the Valley of the Vision. What ails you that all of you have climbed up to the roofs." The midrash begins with an explanation that the valley is either what all seers prophesied or where all seers originated. Another interpretation is that this is where the words of the prophets were thrown to the ground. The latter view is developed in the midrash on the next phrase, "climbed up to the roofs." Aside from the plain meaning, it is also taken to be a haughty attitude among the people.

Isa 22:2 "You are full of uproar (teshu'ot)..." The word "uproar" is explained by use of prooftexts, each giving a different nuance to the sound:

| | |
|---|---|
| Job 39:7 | trouble |
| Isa. 22:2 | disorder |
| Job 30:3 | darkness. |

The verse concludes by explaining that the city is in confusion and is sinful.

Isa 22:3 reads "Your leaders have fled together...fled far away." This verse is explained as showing that the leaders were taken captive. "Far away" means distanced from the Torah, shown by using Jer. 31:20, "Adonai appeared to me from afar."

This verse leads to the next image of God mourning because of this distancing. Isa 22:4 reads "...Leave me alone as I weep

bitterly, don't try to comfort me..." There is further elaboration on three occasions when the angels were not allowed to sing: a) at the flood (Gen 6:3), b) at the sea (Ex. 14:20) and c) at the destruction (Isa. 22:4). They were not allowed to sing because of the horror mentioned in Isa. 22:5, the destruction mentioned by all the prophets.

The destruction is specified by 22:5 meqarqer qir (Qir shouting), in the midrash this is taken to be the destruction of the houses. Isa 22:6 elaborates "Qir uncovered the shield," taken to mean the stones from the walls were used for barricades.

Isa. 22:7 reads "your choicest valleys were filled with chariots and they set for the gate..." The phrase "filled with" is explained as being as deep as water. This imagery borrows from the prooftext of Ex. 14:20, which takes place at the Red Sea. Water, specifically weeping, is also the prevalent image used in Isa 22:4. The image of water also draws upon the Hebrew shot shatu in vs. 7, which can mean to drink, or with a different spelling, can represent a rowboat.

Isa. 22:8 is used to illustrate that Israel was unfaithful and so God did not help her in battle. "The covering of Judah was bared," (Isa. 22:8) is explained as exposing what should have been covered, thereby bringing about disgrace.[2] "You looked (vatabet) that day for the weapons in the forest house." The midrash explains that at Sinai the weapons had God's names on them; these names were removed when Israel sinned. This whole section draws on a theme and image common to Eikhah Rabbah. The covering represents the garment that is removed when Israel

sinned. The garment is tied in with Israel's infidelity. Here this infidelity is represented by the removal of God's names from the weapons. In addition, infidelity is inherent the verse: vatabet can be punned as taba'at, ring, the sign of fidelity now removed. This becomes more apparent with the next prooftext, Ex. 33:6, in which the Israelites are stripped of their ornaments after the sin of the golden calf.

Isa. 22:9-10 is used to show how the Jerusalemites fortified the walls by tearing down houses, thus continuing the theme presented before in the proem. Here the tearing down is regarded as sinful since in so doing they did not show faith in God (Isa. 22:11), it is another sign of infidelity.

To summarize, the message of proem 24 as it develops thematically thus far is as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Isa. 22:1 | Israel disregards prophets |
| 22:2 | this leads to destruction and sin |
| 22:3 | the leaders are taken captive |
| | there is no Torah |
| 22:4 | God mourns |
| 22:5 | the people destroy their own homes |
| 22:6 | use the stones for barricades |
| 22:7 | the enemy appears |
| 22:8 | Israel is unfaithful |
| | God won't help |
| 22:9 | use stones for barricades |
| 22:10 | sinful - they do not believe in God's help |
| 22:11 | they do not believe in God. |

For the most part, the interpretation of the verses follows closely upon the text. When there is elaboration it is presented through puns or the development of imagery: such as the garment or water.

In the second part of the proem, Isa. 22:12 is developed in much greater detail than the previous verses. The verse in the biblical text deals with God's weeping. This is mentioned briefly in vs. 22:4, and is now elaborated in the midrash. The physical method of mourning is explained through the use of Isa 32:11-12 and each act is associated with a specific aspect of destruction: the first Temple, the second Temple, the people. The downfall of each Temple and of the people is illustrated through contrasting verses: Isa 32:12 and Micah 3:12 both deal with fields (the Temples?). Isa 32:12 and Ps. 80:9 both deal with vines (Israel).

Another interpretation of Isa. 22:12 is brought in. Now it is Israel that laments because of the hurban and the distancing from God. This is done through the prooftext of Ps. 42:5, "These things I remember and pour out my soul within me," representing mourning; and Lam. 5:18, "The mountain of Zion is desolate, the foxes walk upon it," symbolizes distancing from God.[4]

This is followed by another interpretation of Isa. 22:12, focusing on God. God withdraws from the Temple in order that the enemy may destroy it. The prooftext, Lam 2:3, states that God draws back His right hand. This, too, ties in with imagery prevalent in chapter one.[5] In the next part of this section, prooftext Hos. 5:15, God withdraws from Israel. Then, through Jer. 13:17, God must mourn for the people in exile; the angels

cannot mourn for him. God and the angels go to inspect the Temple. God weeps, lamenting that the people did not repent when they had so many chances to do so. He then calls on Jeremiah to bring the patriarchs and Moses to mourn with him. When Moses and the patriarchs are told of the destruction, they, too, lament, fulfilling Isa. 22:12.

At this point, R. Shmuel bar Nahman brings in another story concerning Abraham. Here, Abraham laments, wondering why he should be shamed more than the other nations. The ministering angels join him in lament, drawing on Isa. 32:8. By using Jer. 14:15, the angels show God how He has treated Israel worse than idol worshippers (the generation of Enosh).

Abraham pleads for Israel, but Jer. 11:5 shows the futility of this plea, "Why should my beloved be in my house....for you take pleasure in doing evil deeds." God tells Abraham that the people sinned from "A to Z."[6] God calls on the Torah to testify, but Abraham convinces her not to, since Israel accepted the Torah as a covenant. God next calls the letter to testify but Abraham silences them as well. Bringing out the strongest argument, Abraham asks God to remember the <u>akedah</u> as fulfilling his part of the covenant.

The image of the binding of Isaac, acts as a transition for Isaac to speak, asking God to remember his role in the <u>akedah</u>. Jacob speaks up, using his suffering under Laban as his example. Moses also gets a chance to plead for Israel, showing that he suffered by not being allowed into the land. Moses then goes to see how the exiles are doing. When they see that he is

not there to redeem them, they lament the words of Ps. 137:1.[7]

Moses returns to the patriarchs, detailing, in Aramaic, the suffering among the exiles. The horrors multiply, leading Moses to show God how these horrors go against the Torah (Lev. 22:28): "Whether a cow or an ewe, you shall not kill it and its young both in one day."[8]

The mention of the ewe, playing on Rachel's name, serves as a cue for this matriarch to speak up and plead for Israel. She points out that she was not jealous of Leah, therefore God should not be jealous of idolatry.[9] Rachel finally convinces God and the proem ends hopefully with the words of Jer. 31:15-16: "...Refrain your voice from crying and your eyes from tears, your work shall be rewarded...your children shall return to their border." The image of weeping in Isa. 22:12 has come full circle and has gone from lament to hope.

Proem 24 runs the gamut of emotions from despair to hope. Throughout the midrash, the image of weeping keeps reappearing. In fact, Isa. 22:12 is mentioned in a few places, withits meaning changed subtly in each use.[10] This proem employs many of the same prooftexts, images and themes that appear in chapter one. Proem 24 appears to have two distinct sections: Isa. 22:1-11 and an extended section on Isa. 22:12. This latter section has material found elsewhere. For example Rachel's role in the midrash is also found in Eliyahu Rabbah. In his introduction, Buber adds this proem to the list of proems whose source is unknown. Though it is probably not original to Eikhah Rabbah, it is included because of similarities between it and the midrashic

work, as well as the fact that it employs Lamentations verses as prooftexts.

## E. Proems 31A and 31B

Buber believed that two of the proems in Eikhah Rabbah actually contained two proems each. His edition divides proems 2 and 31 into separate elements.

What appears as proem 31A in the Buber edition is a very short proem introduced by R. Shimon bar Yohai. He opens his discourse with Prov. 20:14, "Very bad (r$^{e}$a r$^{e}$a) says the buyer, and as he moves on, he congratulates himself." The gist of his discourse is that God did not appreciate Israel until they were exiled. Jer. 13:10 is brought in to show how God considered Israel bad since they did not follow Him. Yet, once they are exiled, God boasts with the words of Prov. 20:14. This proem transforms the exile into a positive event because God finally appreciates Israel. The proem ends with the later addition "since they sinned they were exiled, etc." According to Buber, this and proem 31B are missing in the manuscript.[1]

According to Buber, the second proem in this section begins with Zeph. 3:1, "Woe to the filthy, polluted, oppressive city." It focuses on filthy (mor'ah), taking this to be "dread." The proof comes from Ex. 15:14; when Israel was redeemed, Edom was filled with fear.[2] The other phrase, "oppressive city" is explained by Zeph. 3:2 as a city that was once distinguished by its deed, now does not trust in God.[3] An Aramaic opinion is now added concerning a foolish bride who does not listen to her husband.[4] R. Reuven now focuses back on the word mor'ah saying it is Greek for a foolish woman. This is developed as showing

that the woe is brought on due to the foolish woman (hoy mor'ah). Venig'alah (polluted) is now explained as having a double meaning: Since the people distanced themselves (pun - exiled, niglu) from Torah, they were too polluted (pun - exiled from) for the priesthood. "The oppressive (yvnh) city" is also explained by way of a pun: it is the city of Jonah. His city, Nineveh, needed only one prophet in order to repent, but Israel did not learn from her numerous prophets. The two prooftexts used for this are II Kings 17:13 and Jer. 7:25-6. Both contain similar wording that God will sent his prophets. Jer. 7:26 leads to a variation on the typical closing statement, "'They did not listen to me.'(Jer. 7:26) Since they did not listen to me they were exiled, and since they were exiled Jeremiah lamented 'eikhah yashvah badad.'" This ending does not appear to be forced, as is the case in 31A.

Overall, proem 31B develops its ideas through specific words, usually by punning on those words. Perhaps it is a pun that has lead this proem to be connected to proem 31A. The connection would be the opening text of each. Proem 31A contains the word r'a, and 31B focuses on mor'ah. Other than that, each proem carries an opposite idea. In 31A God does not appreciate Israel, in 31B Israel does not appreciate God. These proems relate to each other solely in the manner described above. They form a separate unit from the surrounding proems.

## Notes to Section One

(pp. 2 - 8)

1. Joseph Abrahams, Sources of the Midrash Echah Rabbah, Berlin, (1883), pp. 52-6. He divides proems 9 and 25 into two separate proems as well. Perhaps Proem 9 should be divided into two distinct components, but proem 25 has an internal structure that holds it together.

2. Proems 1-7, tradents beginning with aleph; proems 8-11, yod; proems 12-15, het; proems 16-21, aleph.

3. Buber, "Introduction," pp. 3-7.

4. Proem 11 and chapter 1; proem 22 and chapter 2; proems 17, 18 and 28 and chapter 3, proem 22 and chapter 4.

5. Abrahams, Sources, p. 54, hazards a guess as to the number of original proems, though it must be kept in mind that his work preceded Buber's by some dozen years. Another interesting theory is presented by M. Zulai, "Piyyut Qadmon", Tarbitz, 16, (1945), pp. 190-5, that the proems are based on a piyyut from Byzantine times. Of the twenty proems he uses to show this, eleven are from a source unknown to Buber.

6. See the analysis of selected proems for further elaboration.

7. Proem 19, ostensibly concluding with Ps. 137:1, "How shall we sing Adonai's song...," puns the word "how" as an introduction to eikhah. Such a pun can work best when spoken. In addition, the image fits in beautifully with the body of the work.

8. Here again, this cannot apply to all the proems. Some are so short and terse that it is hard to imagine them as meant for oral use.

## Notes to Section Two

### Notes to Proem 5
### (pp. 9 -12)

1. This according to Buber, proem 5, note 2, p. 5.

2. Hql is as "bring contempt, dishonour" in BDB. Soncino, p.7, n. 4, translates it as made light, carrying with it the imagery of swiftness, perhaps a swift departure form the land. The beautiful pun in hql is qlh, the image of a roasted grain. This leads back to Ezek. 24:6, the filth remaining in the cooking pot.

3. The image of the broom also develops the underlying imagery of the "swiftness" by which the punishment of exile is meted out.

4. The mention of this sin recurs in other proems as well as in chapter one. It occurs almost verbatim in proem 23, and is discussed in the analysis of that proem. It is repeated in chapter 2:2 and 4:13. It is also found in **Pesikta deRav Kahane**, piska 13. See Buber, note 8, p. 6.

5. Soncino, p. 8, adds another interpretation of vs. 6 here, but in note 7 says it should be deleted.

6. This makes God directly responsible for the exile, a theme carried out throughout the proems, as well as in chapter one. God's responsibility also suggests that the enemy may be a reluctant instument. This is presented more clearly in proems 24 and 30.

7. R. Eliezer's use of the prooftext is preceded by kol kakh lamah (for what purpose). This phrase also precedes the prooftext of Ezek. 24:8 in this proem. According to Harry Fox, "Circular Proem", Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research, 49, (1983), p. 11, this phrase is one of marks of a circular proem, though the examples he brings are proems 31 and 33.

8. Soncino, p. 9.

9. Many of the proems appear to have this ending "tacked on." This ending is discussed in detail in a separate chapter.

10. See Gen. 3:24, "He drove out Adam and placed at the east of the Garden of Eden ... the fiery, revolving sword, to protect the tree of life."

## Notes to Proems 11 and 12
## (pp. 13 - 18)

1. Soncino, pp. 14-16.

2. Deut. 15:11 begins with patoah, while Lam. 1:17 starts with parshah.

3. The garment is a common image in chapter 1 as well. See especially 1:1, 6, 9, 13, 16.

4. There is an inherent pun in beged (garment) that ties it in to the theme of idolatry and infidelity: bagad.

5. See Ex. 32:4, though gar'a appears in Ex. 32:5 where Aaron announces (vayiqr'a) a holy day.

6. Prooftexts are taken from Ezek. 21:25, 27; II Chron. 36:17; and II Kings 25:9.

7. Isa 1:21 is an interesting choice of text: it begins with the word eikhah and carries with it the image of infidelity/idolatry: "How she has become a prostitute, the faithful city that was full of justice..."

8. See chapter 1:1:2, Soncino p. 69.

9. Yohanan ben Zakkai is also the focus of the anecdotes on Lam. 1:5.

10. In his introduction to Eikhah Rabbah, p. 7, Buber states that 19 proems are from unknown sources; proem 12 is included in this list.

## Notes to Proem 24
## (pp. 19 - 25)

1. Proem 23 represents a complex exposition on Ecc. 12:1-7. Buber, p. 17, note 1, says that it is taken from Ecclesiastes Rabbah, where it also appears. For this reason, proem 23 is not analyzed here.

2. Proem 21 has a similar comment about revealing what should have been kept secret.

3. See for example, 1:1, 6, 9, 13, 16.

4. Ps. 42:5 plays a major role in the the anecdotes of chapter 1:16, where it is God who weeps.

5. See especially 1:10 where God's hand makes Him responsible for the destruction in a manner similar to this proem.

6. This same type of expression is used in chapter 1:1.

7. This verse also plays a major role in proem 19.

8. The contradiction presented by this verse during the destruction is raised in chapter 1:12 as well as 1:16.

9. Once again the themes of covenant/fidelity, infidelity/idolatry, and exile are tied together.

10. This fits in with Fox's view of the circular proem, wherein a verse is used in a proem and given a slightly different meaning in each use, thus allowing for thematic development. See Fox, "Circular Proem," pp. 1-31.

11. Buber, "Introduction," p. 7.

## Notes to Proems 31A and 31B
## (pp. 26 - 27)

1. Buber, proem 31, note 2, p. 33.

2. There are a number of puns here. Nig'alu (redeemed), draws directly on the same word in Zeph. 3:1. Fear in Ex. 15:14 is nivhalu, another play on the same word.

3. Possibly another pun, making the city "Greek," Zeph. 3:1 describes the city as yvnh.

4. This short addition also brings with it the image of covenant/fidelity.

# PART TWO

## THE FIRST CHAPTER OF EIKHAH RABBAH

## SECTION ONE

## THEMES AND IMAGES

Chapter One of Eikhah Rabbah shares a number of themes with the proems. The overall theme of course is that Israel sinned and was punished, a point continuously driven home by the phrase "since they sinned, they were exiled," which concludes all but six of the proems. Chapter One examines the theme of sin and punishment from various perspectives.

In looking at the overall theme, the questions arise as to what was the sin, who committed it and how was it punished. This leads to the particular tripartite motif recurring in chapter one: covenant/idolatry (infidelity)/exile.[1] Various images are used to develop this theme, including adulterous or haughty women, and instances of idolatry, most notably the golden calf.[2]

### A. How Israel Sinned

Throughout the proems and chapter one, the point is repeatedly made that Israel has sinned.[3] Adultery, representing idolatry, is an ever-present motif. This is made clear at the beginning of section 1:1:

> "Isaiah beheld them in their infidelity and exclaimed, 'How is the faithful city become a harlot!'"[4]

The theme of adultery/idolatry continues in section 1:3, "Judah

is gone into exile because of affliction, and because of great servitude." The rabbis interpret the phrase "because of affliction" as meaning idol worship, using the image of the golden calf as an example of this. Idolatry is the common element in the anecdotes of 1:9. Verses 1:18-19 develop the issue of idolatry, drawing on the biblicial text. Lamentations 1:18 reads: "I rebelled against His word," and 1:19 continues, "I called for my lovers yet they deceived me." The comment on 1:18 uses a prooftext from II Chron. 35:20 which is noted as representing idolatrous language. The deception in 1:19 carries an adulterous image. Not only is this the case in the biblical text, the image is punned on in the interpretation of the Jer. 31:21 prooftext as well:

> "That is what Jeremiah says, Set thee up waymarks - ziyyunim (Jer. 31:21), i.e., distinguish thyself with the precepts wherewith Israel is distinguished (mezuyyanim)."[5]

Section 1:22, in the printed version, returns to the image of the golden calf by citing Ex. 32:1, "For as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him." It is the absence of Moses that cause the people to come before Aaron, asking for the construction of an idol. This example is presented as a sin in 1:22.

## B. Accountability for Sin

In a number of instances, the leadership is held responsible for the sins of the people. Thus, the rabbis are brought to task in a comment on Lam 1:6, "Her princes have become like harts that find no pasture:"

> "R. Simon said in the name of R. Simeon b. Abba and R. Simeon b. Lakish said in the name of R. Joshua: As harts turn their faces one beneath the other in time of intense heat, so the eminent men of Israel would see a transgression committed but turn their faces away from it."[6]

Again, in verse 16, the rabbis are criticized for their lack of leadership. In the anecdote concerning Miriam bat Nakdimon, the rabbis permit her a daily allowance of five hundred dinars for perfume:

> "Nevertheless, she stood up and cursed them, saying, 'Make such a [paltry] allowance for your own daughters!' R. Aha said: We responded with Amen!"[7]

This same anecdotal section in 1:16 also holds the social leaders responsible for Israel's fate. This is made clear through the behavior of the characters within these stories. While all the anecdotes present an example of "lo, how the mighty have fallen," there are a few anecdotes concerning women from wealthy Jerusalemite families. These stories of point out how the women brought about their own destruction. Again, Miriam bat Nakdimon

is a good example, as she curses the rabbis for their stinginess in her perfume allowance. Yet she is punished for her behavior:

> "R. Eleazar said: May I not live to behold the consolation [of Zion] if I did not see her gathering barley from beneath horses' hoofs in Acco..."[8]

An allusion to rabbinic responsibility is brought up in section 1:22, using Isa. 9:16, "Every mouth speaks wantonness." This verse is preceded by, "They that lead this people cause them to err" (Isa. 9:15).

### C. God and Israel's Fate

The punishment of Israel is carried out by God.[9] The adversaries acting out God's will are mere agents. Whereas in proems 24 and 30, the foes are reluctant to act because they fear God's wrath, the enemy in 1:10 is zealous, using the plundering of the Temple as an attempt to contradict the Torah.[10]

God's weakness is also emphasized by our text as a factor in the destruction. In section 1:6 it is Israel that has caused God loss of strength. Commenting on Lam. 1:6 "They are gone without strength before the pursuer," the midrash states:

> "When Israel performs the will of the Omnipresent, they add to the strength of the heavenly power...
> "When, however, Israel does not perform the will of the Omnipresent, they weaken,

if it is possible to say so, the great
power of Him Who is above..."[11]

God is not enthusiastic about initiating Israel's destruction. In 1:9, it is God who exclaims "See, Adonai, my misery!'

God mourns the fate of Israel in sections 1:1, 15 and 16. In section 1:1 God turns to the example of a human king mourning in order to see how He should act. Similarly, in proem 24, God weeps when He views the destruction of the Temple. Throughout the anecdotes of 1:16 that recount the horrors that the people underwent, Lam. 1:16 is repeated "For these things I weep." At the conclusion of each anecdote it is God who utters this verse. An additional comment is presented in section 1:16 to show that God weeps. This is an interpretation of the continuation of Lam. 1:16, "My eye, my eye, runs down with water:"

"If it is possible to say so, the Holy One
blessed be He, said, 'Mine eye weeps for My
other eye.'"[12]

God even becomes an active participant, joining the exiles. In section 1:5 this theme is an elaboration of the verse: "Her youngsters are gone into captivity before the enemy."

"R. Judah said: Come and see how beloved
are children by the Holy One blessed be He.
The Sanhedrin was exiled but the Shechinah
did not go into exile with him. The priestly
watches were exiled, but the Shechinah did not
go into exile with them. When, however, the
children were exiled, the Shechinah went into

exile with them.[13]

This point is reiterated in section 1:19, where it is stated that the Shechinah joined the exiles in Elam and Greece.[14]

### D. Repentance and Redemption

Explicitly, Eikhah Rabbah concentrates on the sins of Israel and the resulting catastrophe. Implicitly, the midrash carries a message of hope. When examples of transgressions are presented, it is to encourage repentance, thereby speeding up redemption.

The relationship between transgression and redemption is explicitly played out in several passages. In chapter 1:2 and 22, the authors focus on a key word or phrase,showing this key element as being pivotal in Israel's transgression, punishment and redemption.

> "You find that with the thing through which Israel sinned they were punished, and with the same thing they were comforted. They sinned with 'head,' were punished with it and comforted with it. They sinned with 'head', as it is written, "Let us make a head, and return into Egypt (Num. 14:4); were punished with 'head,' as it is written, "The whole head is sick" (Isa. 1:5); and are comforted with 'head,' as it is written, "And their king is passed on

before them, and the Lord at the head of them (Micah 2:13)."[15]

Section 1:22 continues in this manner, building up a a conclusion that brings comfort to the people. A similar structure may be found in proem 19:

> "Jeremiah said to Israel, 'Had you been worthy, you would be dwelling in Jerusalem and drinking the waters of Shiloah whose waters are pure and sweet; but now that you are unworthy, you are exiled to Babylon and drink the waters of the Euphrates whose waters are impure and evil smelling."[16]

The most direct example of repentance is found in the anecdotes of 1:16. Here, Miriam loses her garment every time she washes it in the sea. It is only when she acknowledges that this loss is punishment for some sin, that she is able to retrieve her garment from the water.

Redemption is not clearly stated in the midrash; it is usually implied through the use of prooftexts. Note, for example, how at the conclusion of the chapter, the printed text ends with the prophet Isaiah's well-known consolation, "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people" (Isa. 40:1). There are, however, two sections where redemption is made explicit. For example, in 1:13 there is mention made of the coming of the messiah:

> "R. Simeon b. Yoḥai taught: If you see a Persian horse tethered in Eretz Israel

look for the feet of the Messiah."[17]

The midrash on 1:16, "For the comforter is far from me," discusses the possible names of the messiah.[18] Towards the end, the name is tied in with the rebuilding of the Temple and comforting the people:

> "R. Joshua b. Levi said: His name is 'Shoot;' as it is stated, "Behold a man whose name is Shoot, and who shall shoot up out of his place, and build the Temple of the Lord" (Zech. 6:12). R. Judan said in the name of R. Aibu: His name is 'Comforter;' as it is said, "The comforter is far from me." R. Hanina said: They do not really differ, because the numerical value of the names is the same..."[19]

Still, both sections 1:13 and 16 are quantitatively meager offerings considering the length of this work.

### E. Images of Repentance, Comfort and Redemption

In the middle portion of the chapter a number of images are utilized to convey the message of hope. Some of these images are common to other midrashic works. For example, the dichotomy between day/light, representing the world to come; and night/darkness, signifying the suffering in the present world, occurs in a number of verses. It is often brought in through a

prooftext, as is the case in section 1:9, which draws upon Esther 3:13 "...to utterly destroy all the Jews...in one day." The verse continues by showing how God was merciful that night, implying that comfort is possible at the bleakest time. This message extends into the next section as well. In 1:10, night occurs in a prooftext from Isa. 15:1, "For in the night that Ar of Moab is laid waste." Here, night is shown to have a positive aspect, since it is the foe who is destroyed at night.

The use of the heavenly lights in 1:13 is taken to be a measure of justice.[20] Gen. 1:16, "God made the great lights (gedolim)," is tied in with the introductory text from Ps. 71:19, "Your justice, God, reaches the heavens, You who have done great things (gedolot), who is like You?" These verses are used to change the meaning of the Lam. 1:13 text, which reads: "From the heavens He sent fire into my bones." The prooftexts are used to ask for justice against the enemies, thereby bringing comfort to the Israel.

The purpose of the day and night imagery is best utilized by R. Hanina in explaining verse 1:14 "Adonai has given me over into their hands against whom I cannot stand:"

> "Into their hands, against whom I am not able to stand, i.e., if I do not work by day, I am not able to stand by night."[21]

This comment appears within a discussion of God having created man to serve Him. Within this context, R. Hanina implies that acts of faith during good times will sustain the people in dark times.

The image of light is utilized in section 1:16 in the discussion of the messiah. Here, the imagery develops through prooftexts. In reference to God, Ps. 72:17 is brought in: "May his name continue as long as the sun." It is also possible to pun on the Hebrew lifney shemesh yanun shemo as: before the light came yanun (the messiah). An additional pun can be made to read this verse as: before the light (redemption) came the Greek foe (yavan). Another prooftext follows using the same imagery, "The light dwells with Him" (Dan. 2:22). Clearly, in this section, light represents redemption.

Water is utilized as a symbol of redemption in a number of midrashim. This symbol occurs in Eikhah Rabbah in a variety of ways.[22]

This image receives the greatest attention in sections 1:16 and 17. The phrase in section 1:16, "For these things I weep," serves as an obvious connection to the image of water. Numerous prooftexts in this section also draw on the water imagery. For example, in the first anecdote, Ps. 68:23 is used "I will bring them back from the depth of the sea." The first anecdote in 1:16 take place on the sea. Ironically, when the Jews on board ship repent, they are saved through drowning.

> "The first company [in the first ship] stood up and said, "Surely we have not forgotten the name of our God, or spread forth our hands to a strange god" (Ps. 44:21), and they threw themselves into the sea. The second company stood up and said, "Nay, but for Thy sake are

> we killed all the day" (Ps. 44:23), and they threw themselves into the sea. The third company stood up and said, "Would not God search this out? For he knoweth the secrets of the heart" (Ps. 44:22), then they threw themselves into the sea. Then the Holy Spirit cried out, "For these things I weep."[23]

Similarly, the Buber edition begins section 1:17 with the image of a drowning man in a river reaching out to grasp anything. The image is related to the parable of a king's son spreading out his hands to admit his sin. Here, the water prompts the drowning man's repentance.

Section 1:16 also contains a parable of a king who builds his palace near a pool of water. In the analogy to God, the waters praise God but people do not. This occurs when God brings on the flood, and by implication, the covenant after the flood.[24]

The connection between water and redemption is also clear in the anecdote about Miriam bat Tanḥum, who is redeemed from captivity in Akko. When she washes her garment in the water, it is taken out to sea. Miriam realizes that this is a punishment:

> "When she justified the heavenly decree against herself, the Holy One, blessed be He, gave a hint to the sea which restored her garments to her."[25]

The image of water in Eikhah Rabbah is unique in one aspect. It is not solely redemptive. Water carries danger. Perhaps this explains the image in the first anecdote of 1:16, where the

repentant people must drown in order to be saved. The negative side of water is also made evident by the verse itself "For these things I weep." The tears carry a negative connotation; they are God's tears and He is mourning. Finally, the very image of the water becomes soiled, as in this example from an anecdote describing the slaughter carried out by Trajan:

> "He forthwith surrounded them with his legions and slaughtered them, so that their blood... streamed [to the coast and stained the sea] as far as Cyprus. Then the Holy Spirit cried out, "For these things I weep."[26]

### F. Other Recurring Images

Chapter One of Eikhah Rabbah contains a few unusual images. One such image, recurring throughout the chapter, is the garment. It appears in sections 1:1, 6, 9, 13 and 16, overlapping in most instances other images used to represent the theme of covenant/idolatry/exile.

In each verse, the garment takes on a slightly different nuance, yet all the variations relate to the central tripartite theme of covenant/idolatry/exile. In verse 1 the type of garment worn is the measure of Israel's relation with God. When they obey God they are clothed majestically, otherwise they are clothed like exiles.[27] In section 1:6, the image is drawn from the text in Ps. 114:1, "You are clothed in glory and splendor,"

and Prov. 31:25, "Strength and splendor are her clothes." The latter verse is taken as a reference to the religious leaders. This is also the case in section 1:9 where the image is drawn from the Lamentation verse itself: "Her uncleanliness was in her skirts." The example here is of priestly misconduct. Verse 13 draws on the word 'garment' as used in Ezek. 10:2, "the man clothed in linen;" the clothing implying righteousness. Finally, verse 16 shows how the image of the garment can change. Miriam bat Tanhum, freed from imprisonment in Akko, washed her garment in the sea. The water carried it away each time she did so. It is only when she correctly took this as a sign of her transgressions, and she repented, that the clothes washed ashore.

There is another story in section 1:16 that centers on a garment as well. This story is included in the section on the messiah's name. A man travels from city to city, selling garments along the way.[28] At one location, a woman does not buy clothes for her child because a bad fate awaits him since he was born around the time of the hurban. The man gives the woman some clothes, saying he will return later for the money. When he returns in a few days, the woman says a wind has carried off her child. The man takes this to be a positive sign: "Did I not tell you at his coming [the Temple] was destroyed and at his coming it will be rebuilt?"[29] In this case, clothes are tied to the coming of the messiah and to national redemption.

The use of the garment in chapter one is evident within the various stages of Israel's relationship with God. The garment can be a sign of fidelity, then infidelity and exile, personal

atonement, and finally, a hope for national redemption.

Another image occuring throughout chapter one is that of hands. The hand generally represents power and action, and in the text is used vis à vis the destruction. It can cause the destruction or avert it. In section 1:2, for example, it is God's right hand that is the measure of hope for Israel:

> "And I say: This is my weakness (hallothi) that the right hand of the Most High could change (Ps. 57:11). R. Alexandri said: The meaning is, because we did not entreat (hillinu) Thy presence in penitence, Thy right hand has changed. R. Samuel b. Nahmani said: The meaning is, the oath which Thou didst make with us at Horeb has been desecrated (nithallelah), and therefore Thy right hand has changed."[30]

As the discussion progresses, an attempt is made to find hope in the present situation, represented by God's hand:

> "R. Simeon b. Lakish said: If it is due to illness there is hope, because whoever is ill may in the end become well again; but if there is a change in His right hand, there is no hope."[31]

The attempt at consolation fails. This is made evident by the closing of this section which also utilizes the image of the hand. In this case, it is the human hands of young men of the Temple unable to wipe their tears away because their hands are bound behind their backs.

In verse 1:9, the image of the Divine hand also takes on the meaning of God's oath. The image recurs in 1:10 where its presence is due to the Lamentations verse, "The foe has spread out his hand." The hand becomes an instrument of destruction in this verse. When verse 9 and 10 are read together, it is possible to view the hand of destruction as belonging to God. God is not powerless: He appears to have gone back on his oath to Israel by becoming the perpetrator of the destruction.[32] Indeed, hands bring about destruction in 1:13 as well. This is based on Ezek. 10:2 where the man clothed in white linen is told: "Go among the wheelwork, under the cherub, and fill your hands with fiery coals." As the midrash develops, the coals were passed from one divine being to another, resting with Gabriel who held onto them for six years. When he saw that the people did not change their ways, he poured the coals on them. It is God who cautions Gabriel to have patience with the people.

Hands that destroy can also save. This is part of the message in section 1:2. It is developed more clearly in section 1:17, where the image appears in the Lamentations verse: "Zion spreads out her hands" (Lam. 1:17). The explanation is that this is like the action of a drowning man desperately trying to grasp something in order to be saved.[33] This is followed by the parable of a king who beats his son for having sinned. The son admits his sin by spreading out his hands.[34] Here, the son's action, using his hand, represents both repentance and redemption.

The meaning of the hand develops throughout the midrash. First, there is a questioning of God's intention, with God's hand

used as a measure of hope in section 1:2. In this same section, man's hands are literally tied behind his back. The Divine hand clearly mandates God's punishment in sections 1:9 -10. God is carrying out the destruction because Israel has not fulfilled her part of the oath. In 1:13 it is apparent that God is on Israel's side, patiently waiting for Israel to change her ways. Finally, in section 1:17 it is Israel that must take action, admitting transgression, in order to accept punishment and bring about the implied redemption.

A third recurring motif is that of food. Actually, a variety of images are associated with food. Food plays a major role in the anecdotes of 1:1, serving as the object used by the Jerusalemites to show up the Athenians and the rabbis as well. In 1:2 food is associated with tears. This is derived from the verse, "My tears have been my food (lehem) day and night." (Ps. 42:4).[35] The food is first related to mourning and then to exile.

Food becomes a measure of how well a situation is going throughout Eikhah Rabbah. This is developed more clearly in section 1:5. On the one hand, the anecdotes show the wealth of Jerusalem in the amount of food that could be stored for extended periods of time. On the other hand, the fall of the city is clearly demonstrated by the people boiling straw and drinking this concoction in order to survive.[36] It is at this point that ben Zakkai decides that it is time to leave the city. At the end of the anecdotal section, there is the incidental piece about Rabbi Tsadok, the man who had fasted for so many years to save

Jerusalem. Food is elevated to a spiritual plane by this information and what follows is that Rabbi Tsadok could eat one bean and teach one hundred chapters after consuming this miniscule amount. In both these cases, food and fasting are associated with mitzvot.

In section 1:9 food is given a holy association. The beginning of this section deals with idolatry and child sacrifice. There is a parable of a matrona cooking a meal for a king and using his favorite utensils for this purpose. The prooftext from Ezek. 16:20, "Moreover, you have taken your sons and daughters whom you have borne unto Me, and sacrificed unto them (the idols) to be consumed," completes the connection between idolatry, and the image of eating food. The image is returned to later on in the verse.[37] First there is the reference from Deut. 22:6 that one may take the eggs from a nest but not the mother bird. This is followed with Lev. 22:28 stressing that an animal and its young may not be killed on the same day. Finally, there is the reference from Lev. 17:13 that the blood of an animal should not be consumed. The association of food with idolatry shows Israel's sin; food, or lack thereof also became part of their punishment.

The spiritual dimension of food is expanded in the material on verse 11. The image is prompted by the verse itself, "All her people sigh, they search for bread, they give their treasures for food to maintain themselves." At first, food is again used as a measure of the situation. During the first destruction there was food available for some; but not so during the second hurban. It

was so terrible a situation that a golden basket was sent down in exchange for food.[38] Finally, straw was sent up to be used for food. Next, the phrase "to maintain themselves" is interpreted as meaning "to refresh the soul." Again, this is measured in food, the amount necessary for the soul being a date or fig.[39]

Food represents not only the laws of the Torah, as in section 1:9, but the Torah itself. In 1:5, R. Tsadok teaches Torah after eating very little. In 1:11 the people exchange their treasure (Torah?) for straw. Note that ben Zakkai, who established a school of study, left Jerusalem at the point where the people were consuming straw (instead of Torah?).

Section 1:12 continues the association between food and the laws of Torah. This verse concludes with the <u>'olal</u>, the laws of the gleanings, taken from Deut. 24:21.

The symbol of food appears again in the material on verse 14.[40] At the beginning of the verse, one of the reasons given for the exile taking place in the summer is that the people would have sustenance. This is also the reason for the route taken on the journey into exile, so that food would be available. Food, or lack of it, is raised as an issue again in R. Tanhum ben R. Jeremiah's statement: "Four things weaken a man's strength, viz., fasting, a journey, sin and the kingdom of Babylon."[41] At the end of this verse, R. Huna once again uses food as a symbol. He compares man to an indentured servant who will not eat if he does not work. This is then explained as R. Huna's opinion that if a man does not work by day, he cannot sustain himself at night.[42] The implicit sustenance here is the importance of Torah

during the night of exile. This develops from the earlier portion of this midrash where God intentionally placed food along the route of the exile in order to sustain the people.

More than an image, food, or lack thereof, becomes a symbol in Chapter One. It is the concrete measure of the physical situation of the people. Food, through proper sacrifice, also serves to show the people's fidelity to God's laws. Finally, food represents the spiritual sustenance of Torah.

The recurring images in Chapter One are used within the overall theme of sin, exile and redemption. It is through a combination of images, such as day/night, light/darkness, or water as redemption, that a message of hope is derived from the midrash. The motifs of the garment, the hand, and food provide a novel emphasis to the midrash, tying together what otherwise would be discrete sections. Whether intentional or subconscious, the images provide a flow in the text, developing the overall message: the people have sinned and God punishes them by exile; but God does not abandon the people - He provides, sustains, and will eventually redeem them.

## SECTION TWO

## THE ANECDOTES

Anecdotal material appears in five different places in Chapter One of 'Eikhah Rabbah. There are short episodes in sections 1:3 and 9, dealing with the devil (geteb) and child sacrifice, respectively. Both of these sections are mainly in Aramaic. Section 1:3 includes a number of tradents, while verse 9 is anonymous.

There are also three sections that make extensive use of anecdotes: sections 1:1, 5, and 16. Each of these centers around a different theme. Section 1:1 illustrates the wit and intelligence of the Jerusalemites. Throughout the various anecdotes in this section, the Jerusalemites humorously outsmart foreigners, as well as their own leaders. Section 1:5 recounts the story of Yohanan ben Zakkai's escape from Jerusalem and his encounters with Vespasian and his cohorts. Section 1:16 offers tales of horror suffered by the Jerusalemites at the hands of their enemies. Each one of these three anecdotal units will be detailed in this section.

### A. Section 1:1 - How Smart Were They?

The anecdotes in verse 1 are introduced by the biblical verse "she that was great among the nations." An explanation follows:

"The meaning is that she was great in intellect. R. Huna said in the name of R. Jose: Wherever a Jerusalemite went in the provinces, they arranged a seat of honour for him to sit upon in order to listen to his wisdom."[1]

The anecdotes following this illustrate the wisdom of Jerusalemites, usually in a humorous vein.

The first series of anecdotes builds upon "wherever a Jerusalemite went in the provinces," as well as the Jerusalemite's wisdom. In this series, the stories deal with Jerusalemites traveling outside their city, outwitting residents of other places. The first story is of a Jerusalemite who travels to an unnamed province.[2] The next two stories are of Jerusalemites in Athens.[3] All these stories show the Jerusalemites getting the upper hand against their foreign hosts who had wished to outwit them. The events center on a meal. All of them treat the foreigners in an insulting manner. The first story, where the Jerusalemite explains how he has carved the fowl, offers a backhanded compliment to the hosting family.[4] The second story states the opinion of the Athenian who found out from a Jerusalemite that he was illegitimate. Outwitted and disgraced the Athenian believes that "the Jerusalemites will come and make us all illegitimate."[5] The third story ends with a statement that probably voices the wish of many faced with persecution: "What you intended to do to me I have done to you."[6]

The next series of stories shifts the scene to foreigners, specifically Athenians, being outsmarted in Jerusalem. This

section consists of eight anecdotes.[7] The first four stories deal with children outwitting the Athenians. Of these, the latter three, once again, use food as the basis onwhich the Jerusalemites outsmart the foreigner.

The first story in this series is interesting because of a number of connections that can be made to other parts of the midrash.[8] An Athenian arrives at a school in Jerusalem while the teacher is out and begins questioning the students. They challenge him to a question game, the loser forfeits his garment. The students have fun with the foreigner by asking him a riddle which is the Jewish version of the Sphinx's riddle:

> "...nine go out but eight come in, two pour out but one drinks, and twenty-four serve."[9]

The Athenian is unable to respond and loses his garment. He is saved by the teacher, R. Yoḥanan ben Zakkai,[10] who provides him with the answers so that he may regain his clothes. The students have the last word, quoting Samson's response in Judges 14:18 when his riddle was solved in a similar manner: "Had you not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle."

The most direct link between this story and other portions of the midrash is the mention of R. Yoḥanan ben Zakkai. There is extensive anecdotal material about him, as will be seen in section 1:5. There, too, R. Yoḥanan ben Zakkai takes part in a riddle solving 'competition.' Eikhah Rabbah is somewhat ambivalent about R. Yoḥanan ben Zakkai. Comparing him with the Philistine woman alluded to in Judges 14:18, places his aiding the Athenian in a negative light. R. Yoḥanan's act may be

construed as "helping the enemy."

In terms of imagery, it is interesting to note that, once again, a garment plays a key element in the events taking place. The most extensive use of this image is found in verse 9, though it appears earlier in the parable in verse 1. The garment is soiled and/or shed when the wearer is unworthy of it. The wearer is unworthy when he does not know or follow the commandments. Here, the Athenian is obviously unaware of the Jewish commandments. He cannot answer that "eight come in' refers to circumcision. In the other places that employ the imagery of the garment, circumcision is present as well.[11]

The last four "Athenians in Jerusalem" stories deal with the encounters between Athenians and adult Jews. In turn, the Athenian is outsmarted by a tailor, a priest, a one-eyed slave and an 'average' Jerusalemite.[12] In terms of humor, these stories are uneven. The story of the priest has no punchline.[13] The other three stories are in keeping with the mood set before.

The focus shifts to another set of stories that come under the general rubric of rabbis interpreting dreams. The first set consists of the rivalry between R. Ishmael and a "Samaritan" interpreter. Naturally, R. Ishmael provides the proper interpretation, and in the course of his interpretation he manages to sling a few choice curses at the Samaritan. A number of these stories, with variations, appear in B.T. Berakhot 56b where R. Ishmael is approached by a min, a sectarian.

A theme that appeared earlier in verse 1 reappears in the competition between R. Ishmael and the Samaritan. The theme of

covenant/infidelity/disgrace is evident in a few ways. First of all, R. Ishmael interprets the first set of dreams as dealing with incest (infidelity). Next, R. Ishmael brings in the verse Gen. 15:5, "look toward heaven and count the stars." The meaning of this prooftext is changed here; instead of showing how numerous the Jews will be it is utilized to show that a Jew has been killed. This verse also signifies the covenant (here possibly, its destruction). Finally, the rabbi disgraces the Samaritan. It is the Samaritan who is the foil for playing out the theme.

In addition, images of food are present once more. Here too, they play a role in the downfall of the non-Jew.

The second set of stories in this section deal with the dream interpretation of other rabbis, sometimes in competition with their disciples. In the first of these stories, a student of R. Akiva is unable to concentrate on his studies because of a disturbing dream.[14] The dream is interpreted as being a good omen through the use of various puns: Adar/hidur, Nissan/nisyonim, and regel indicating both leg and festival. In the second dream, which also appears in B.T. Berakhot 56b, R. Akiva sends a man to a foreign province to get his inheritance.[15] This is reminiscent of the first of the anecdotes where a Jerusalemite merchant died in one of the provinces and his son set out to claim his inheritance. The next story, also appearing in B.T. Berakhot 55b, deals with a women who has her dreams interpreted by R. Eleazar, though one time when he is gone, his disciples misinterpret the dream. The final story, from B.T. Erubin 53b[16]

deals with R. Joshua in two incidents. First, he is outsmarted by two children, reminiscent of the earlier Athenian tales. Second, he is outsmarted by a widow. In the last two cases, food or a complete meal play a major role in the anecdote. The final story ties in with the rest of verse 1, the phrase, "has become a widow," and indeed gives it a positive twist.

It is evident that these anecdotes were placed in the midrash at different times, based on content, language and parallel texts. The last series, dealing with the rabbis are the earliest stories. These stories have parallels in both Talmuds and in Bereshit Rabbah. The last stories concerning R. Joshua are are probably the earliest since they are in Hebrew (except for one line) with talmudic parallels in Erubin 53b. It is possible that this one section was used to illustrate the portion of the midrash preceding the anecdotes:

> "Davar aher, rabatei ʿam: great in wisdom (hokhmah) ... ruling with Torah... great in knowledge (dʿeot)"

The stories concerning R. Joshua all demonstrate how he is outsmarted by three different people. The R. Joshua anecdote shows wisdom on the part of the boy giving the rabbi directions. The little girl outsmarts him through a story from Torah. The widow teaches him a lesson in her knowledge of the laws of pe'ah. Without the other anecdotes, the widow plays an important role in transposing the meaning of widow in Lam. 1:1, the section that precedes the anecdotes in the midrash.[17]

The other stories of the rabbis, such as the R. Ishmael stories presented in Aramaic, were added later. They are closer

in theme to the stories of the Athenians and Jerusalemites. Perhaps they were brought in at the same time as the Athenian tales with the intention of providing a polemic against whoever was considered a sectarian at that specific instance.

The anecdotes of the Athenians and Jerusalemites are all in Aramaic and also represent a later addition. They illustrate the comment of R. Huna in the name of R. Jose.

This comment in the name of R. Jose is in Hebrew and contains one Greek word. The story that follows it is in Aramaic. The comment and story form a separate unit in and of themselves. The story does not fit with the Athenian anecdotes; in fact, it sticks out because it fails to mention a foreign location. It is this writer's belief that this story preceded the Athenian stories in the midrash. The other possibility is that they represent two different branches, intertwined in the midrash now before us.

The purpose of the inclusion of the R. Joshua anecdotes in verse 1 is show that the widow is not destitute. She has her wits about her and can survive. The later material, specifically the tales of the Jerusalemites and the Athenians, brings with it other messages and hidden emotions that change the meaning of the text. There is a sense of superiority as well as a repressed desire to have misfortune befall the foe. Moreso than in the earlier stories, the humor presents the Jerusalemite in a confident, almost obnoxious manner, perhaps the way the oppressed Jew wished he could let out his aggravation.

## B. Section 1:5 - Yohanan ben Zakkai

This verse presents a series of anecdotes about Yohanan ben Zakkai. The stories are introduced by an anecdote about three rich Jerusalemites who could have fed the city for a number of years.[18] This leads up to the fact that ben Batiyah,[19] ben Zakkai's nephew, was in charge of the storehouses and burned them, which in turn provides the first anecdote concerning R. Yohanan ben Zakkai. Upon hearing of this destruction, ben Zakkai supposedly said "nay." When confronted by ben Batiyah, ben Zakkai claims that he uttered "yay," thereby saving his skin.

Three days later, ben Zakkai observes people in the marketplace boiling straw for food. He decides it is time to leave and does so, with the assistance of **Bar Siqr'ah**, presumably the same person as his nephew. They work out a plan to get ben Zakkai out of Jerusalem disguised as a corpse.[20]

Once past the guards and outside the city ben Zakkai's accomplices return to Jerusalem as he makes his way to Vespasian's camp. He greets Vespasian as emperor, citing a Isa. 10:34, "Lebanon shall fall by a might one," as his reason for this salutation.[21]

The rabbi is put through a series of tests. First, he is placed in a dark chamber, and is questioned on what time of day it was. Yohanan ben Zakkai was able to respond correctly by timing his studies. Three days later, after Vespasian finishes his bath, a messenger brings the news that Nero is dead and Vespasian is emperor. He is unable to put on one of his shoes because of a

swollen foot. Vespasian sends for ben Zakkai who again uses biblical verses to explain Vespasian's condition and to tell him how to cure it. Vespasian's generals begin to speak to ben Zakkai in riddles. It ends up being a one on one competition between the rabbi and Amgar,[22] ending with a curse placed on Amgar by ben Zakkai.

Next, Vespasian says he will grant ben Zakkai's request. The rabbi asks the emperor to abandon his quest of Jerusalem. he then asks that the gate to Lod be left open for a few hours so that people may leave. This request is granted.[23]

Once Jerusalem is captured, ben Zakkai is granted a request that R. Tsadok be brought out. Ben Zakkai treats him with great respect, explaining to Vespasian the old man's greatness.[24] R. Tsadok, who for forty years has been denying himself food, is brought back to health by the physicians, rewarding them in this world with weights and digital calculation.[25]

Jerusalem is destroyed, except for the Western Wall which Amgar should have destroyed. Amgar is ordered to die for not having carried out his part of the destruction, fulfilling the curse R. Yohanan ben Zakkai placed upon him during their riddle competition.

These stories closely parallel the version that appears in B.T. Gittin 56a, and indeed there is a possibility that they stem from the same source.[26] The variations that appear between the talmudic and midrashic version may be due to different purposes. The Talmud is interested in ben Zakkai as the founder of Yavneh, the midrash concentrates on the destruction of Jerusalem.[27]

Yet Jerusalem is not the focus of these anecdotes, nor is it the horror that the people faced. These tales of horror appear in B.T. Gittin and indeed form the third major set of anecdotes in Eikhah Rabbah. What then is the purpose of separating the ben Zakkai tales?

The common threads of the talmudic and midrashic ben Zakkai stories are the escape from Jerusalem, the meeting with Vespasian, its ensuing tests, and some request made of the emperor. This midrash differs in a number of respects: 1) In the section on riddles, ben Zakkai is put in direct competition with Amgar and ends up cursing him; 2) R. Yohanan asks for a period of time in which some Jerusalemites can flee; and 3) The curse against Amgar is fulfilled.

The focus of this section appears to be the comparison between R. Yohanan and Amgar. If R. Yohanan's request in the midrash is to prevent the criticism that occurs in the Talmud, this is only for the purpose of making him even less blemished when compared to Amgar.

The R. Yohanan/Amgar competition is directly parallel to the R. Ishmael/sectarian exchanges in the anecdotes on verse 1. In both cases, the rabbi makes the correct interpretation of the dream or riddle. Similarly, in both cases, the rabbi angrily curses the non-Jew. The role of Amgar is not immediately clear and is examined elsewhere.[28] For now, it is sufficient to say that the Amgar portions of the story are a later portion, the focus of the ben Zakkai story presented in Eikhah Rabbah. Whether portions of the story existed in the midrash prior to this addition is impossible

to say. The insertion of the entire story, with the Amgar pieces, form a cohesive unit. The complete tale contains similarities to other portions of the midrash in terms of themes and images, as has been discussed in Section One.

Another similarity to the previous set of anecdotes is that R. Yohanan again aids a foreigner in solving a puzzle. As in verse 1, he comes to the aid of the Athenian who "lost his shirt" to the rabbi's students, in verse 5 R. Yohanan makes the correct interpretations for Vespasian, certainly no friend of the Jews. In both cases R. Yohanan is aiding a person who represents the enemy. Yet, in verse 5, ben Zakkai is presented more positively since he is aiding the Divine will by helping the foe.

There is also the image of the emperor's swollen foot and the interpretation of this phenomenon by R. Yohanan. In verse 1, R. Akiva interprets a student's dream, with much of his interpretation based on the double meaning of regel (foot). The ben Zakkai story with the emperor makes more sense in terms of context than does the R. Akiva dream interpretation. This is because in the ben Zakkai interpretation concerns the fact that Vespasian's foot has swollen. It is also interesting to note that in the printed edition, the section 1:1 anecdote speaks about R. Yohanan, not R. Akiva, thereby associating R. Yohanan with the symbol of regel (foot) in both sections 1:1 and 5.[29]

The Yohanan ben Zakkai anecdotes serve the purpose of elevating ben Zakkai in order to lower the enemy more completely. As presented in these stories, the enemy is not the emperor. The horrors he is responsible for are saved for a more appropriate

location. Instead, the emperor is downplayed and Amgar symbolizes the foe. This series of anecdotes conclude not with the establishment of Yavneh, but rather with the destruction of Amgar. This gives new meaning to verse 5, for in Amgar's destruction it is now possible to see the final outcome of what began as "Her foes are now the masters." What is alluded to in the older text, where R. Eleazar asks his father to give the enemy their reward in the present world, is spelled out clearly when the incidents with Amgar are added to the R. Yohanan ben Zakkai tales.

### C. Section 1:16 - The Victims

The anecdotes in verse 16 present a list of horrors that the Jerusalemites suffered under their enemies. This list, in the Buber edition, is not directly related to the verse, "For these things I weep" (Lam. 1:16). Rather, it illustrates the verse "These things I remember," (Ps. 42:5).[30]

The section is introduced in the Buber edition with a reminder of the joyous pilgrimages to Jerusalem before it fell into the foe's hands. R. Levi takes the word hogeg (celebration) in Ps. 42:5 and turns celebration to mourning by using the Greek 'agog'a.[31] This sets the mood for the horrors that follow.

The first set of anecdotes begins with the accursed Vespasian sending three ships loaded with the elite of Jerusalem to serve in Roman brothels.[32] The prisoners decide they will not

anger God outside Jerusalem as they had done within. Through a series of biblical verses, each shipload of prisoners realizes that suicide is the only way out. They all jump into the sea, and the Holy Spirit cries, "For these things I weep."

The second story deals with the accursed Hadrian setting up three garrisons to coax Jews out of hiding. He then ordered the Jews slaughtered by the time he finished eating his meal. This is followed by a story (_'uvd'a haveh_) of Jews in hiding resorting to cannibalism for survival.

The third story in this series concerns Trajan's wife misunderstanding Jewish holidays. She sees the Jews mourning at her child's birth on 9 Av, whereas they rejoice at the baby's death on Chanukah. Trajan sets sail, intending to teach the Jews a lesson. His voyage takes half the intended time; apparently he is fulfilling a Divine mission. He slaughters the men, and when the women refuse to submit to his troops, they are massacred as well.

The second set of stories begins with an anecdote about the children of the high priest Tsadok who are enslaved and eventually brought together in marriage.[33] Rather than commit this horror, they opt for suicide.

The next story, in Hebrew, is a version of the well-known tale of the woman and her seven sons.[34] Here, the mother is identified as Miriam bat Tanḥum. The sons refuse to take part in idolatry and each, in turn,is killed.[35] This is followed by a short incident, also in Hebrew, about D'oeg ben Yosef who used to give his son's weight in gold to the Temple, and ended up eating

his son.[36]

These tales relate to the first set of stories. In each set, the first story deals with a ship, the second story involves a slaughter, the following story deals with cannibalism. More importantly, these stories play up the theme of covenant/infidelity. Unlike earlier portions of the midrash where Israel breaks the covenant and commits infidelity/idolatry, in these stories the characters refuse to commit infidelity (the people on the ship, Tsadok's children), or idolatry (the seven sons). The covenant is reaffirmed, as on the three ships or by the children of the priest.

The last set of stories represents the sinners. First comes Mart'a bat Beytus,[37] married to the high priest. In the previous series, a priestly family was an example for good; here it is associated with evil. This is more in keeping with the overall imagery presented in Eikhah Rabbah. Mart'a is presented as a delicate creature who had carpets laid out wherever she stepped outside. When her husband died, the rabbis permitted her an extra portion of wine for comfort. Ultimately, her punishment came when she was dragged behind some horses.[38]

The second story is that of Miriam, daughter of Nakdimon[39]. Her story builds up on the previous one. The rabbis allow her an outrageous allowance for perfume and yet she cursed the rabbis for allowing her so little money. She is said to have gathered grain from under horses hooves in Akko.

Miriam bat Tanhum, mentioned earlier in the story of the seven sons, appears again in the last tale. When she was

ransomed in Akko, she was given a dress. Every time she washed the garment, the sea took it away and she needed a new one. Finally, she realized this was a punishment and she repented, at which point she got the garment back.

These three stories of sinners all deal with women. This may be coincidence, or an enhancement of the image of Jerusalem as female. It could also play up the prophetic image of Israel as an adultress. The sin represented in all three cases is vanity. In the first two stories, rabbis are also implicated in the sin. This draws in the theme recurring throughout Chapter One that the leadership sinned.

Interestingly, the section ends with a woman repenting. Perhaps this is meant to be the message of the section. What is problematic is that, at least in this midrash, this is the same woman who lost her seven sons and committed suicide. Certainly, there is no message of hope here for the repenter!

The anecdotes in this verse make repeated use of certain images. The most common image is that of water. Not only the ships on the sea, but in two instances of slaughter, blood is said to stain the sea.[40] In the last story, Miriam bat Tanhum washes her garment in the sea. The image of water emphasizes the weeping mentioned throughout this verse. In an ironic way, it also represents a spiritual cleansing. The three shiploads of Jews repent and are "saved" by drowning. Miriam repents and gets her dress back from the sea.

The other striking image is that of the garment. It was present in previous verses (1:1, 9) in the same way. The garment

of the sinner is shed, that of the righteous is kept. Here, Miriam regains her garment after repenting.

This anecdotal section conveys a mixed message. It shows the horrors of the times, though frankly there are numerous stories in the Talmud, more horrible than these, that could have been used for this purpose. Some of the stories carry a message of righteousness in the face of adversity. Other lay blame for sin with the leadership. All the stories deal with the elite of Jerusalem, the ones looked up to for guidance. The final story says that it is not too late, although evidently it was too late for Miriam bat Tanḥum.

Perhaps this section of anecdotes cannot be looked at separately. Within the context of verse 16 it is part of a long, seemingly hopeless, introduction that leads to a message of hope at the end of the verse.

The role of this anecdotal section is easier to see when compared to the other anecdotes. It provides a balance to the anecdotes in section 1:1, showing the dark side of those witty Jerusalemites. It also provides a balance for section 1:5, showing the sinister aspect of the emperor, which had been downplayed in section 1:5. The anecdotes in section 1:16 also serve as a note of caution. The demise of the foe has been predicted, but the time has not arrived. Section 1:16, through the stories, calls for perseverance.

The extensive use of anecdotes in Eikhah Rabbah does more than exaggerate the message of Lamentations.[41] They are employed to build the mood presented by the midrash in a

dramatic way This mood is conveyed, for example, by empowering the widow in the R. Joshua story of section 1:1, or by setting an example for righteousness in the worst situations, as in the stories of Jerusalem's elite choosing death over sin in section 1:16. The anecdotes carry their own message, sometimes added to the work at a later time, highlighting a nuance of the midrash, and often changing the meaning of the biblical text as well.

## SECTION THREE

## POSSIBLE HISTORICAL REFERENCES IN EIKHAH RABBAH

### A. Attempts at Dating the Midrash

It is presumed by most scholars that Eikhah Rabbah is one of the oldest exegetical midrashim in existence, dating from as early as the fifth century CE Palestine. It is also generally accepted that the proems are later than the body of the work. These assumptions are based on Buber's comments in his introduction to the midrash. Buber dates the compilation of Eikhah Rabbah to the early part of the fifth century, post-dating the Palestinian Talmud.[1]

Even without dating the material, exactly, it is evident that there are numerous layers within the midrash. Attempts have been made to date the midrash, or at least portions of it, through small clues found in the work. This method dates back to Buber, who pointed to a number of discrete problems in language, tradents, material shared with other midrashim.[2]

One attempt to date the material by Buber is based on the appearance of the Latin phrase, "vive domine imperator," appearing in the Ben Zakkai anecdotes in the printed version.[3] This is the sole Latin phrase in a work that is a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic, with a number of Greek loan words.

Another clue would be the references to historical events. Foremost, naturally, are the references to the destruction of the

two Temples. Both are mentioned in the midrash, sometimes jointly (1:5), sometimes separately. Rulers are mentioned throughout the work. The most frequent names are the Roman emperors Vespasian, Titus, Trajan and Hadrian. In chapter one (1:13) there is also a reference to the procurator Tineius Rufus. Among the Jewish figures present in the midrash are Yohanan ben Zakkai (1:5), Ben Batiah (1:5) Bar Kokhba (Kosiba) (proem 33), and R. Akiva (chap. 2).

In addition, there are even cases of historical confusion, which is quite natural when a verse concerning the first destruction is used to illustrate the second destruction, as when Vespasian appears in proem 12. This confusion points to the unreliability of using the midrash for historical accuracy. The intention of the work is not to convey facts, but rather mood. Eikhah Rabbah may incidentally divulge cultural information, such as etiquette and the eating habits of Jerusalemites in the anecdotes of section 1:1. It is through examination of the seemingly ahistorical material that portions of the midrash might be dated.

## B. The figure of Qeteb

One possibility for dating portions of the material could be made by looking at the material in section 1:3 relating to the figure of Qeteb. This demon is appears between 17 Tammuz and 9 Av.[4] An investigation would have to be made involving this

demonic character's appearance elsewhere. Research would also have to be done into the angels that appear in this midrash, such as Gabriel and Michael in section 1:13. All this could aid in dating certain portions of the work, but remains beyond the scope of this thesis.

### C. The Appearance of Arabs in the Midrash

Attempts have been made to date portions of the material based on the mention of Arabs. For example, section 1:14 discusses the burden of being under foreign control. Buber's edition ends with mention of "Edom and Seir," while the printed version has "Edom and Ishmael."[5] The mention of Arabs in a few places in the midrash has led to discussion of this term being: 1) a specific identifiable entity or 2) a general description of the local population. This is left unclear by the use of the word "arab" in section 1:16, where it is used simply as a description to advance a story. The reference is always along the lines of "an arab said," in which this person is dealing with a Jew. The Arab in this case appears to refer to a local inhabitant, and is not a national/religious identification.

The first mention of Arabia is that of a geographic location. This appears in section 1:5:

> "For three and a half years Vespasian surrounded Jerusalem, having four generals with him, the general of Arabia, of Africa, of Alexandria, and

of Palestine."[6]

Arabia is also mentioned in 1:15:

> "R. Abba b. Kahana said: In Bar Gamza they call refuse, 'sallutha.' R. Levi said: In Arabia they call a comb, 'mesalselah.'"[7]

Here, too, the reference is to a geographic location.[8] One final occurance of "Arabia" is in section 1:21, quoting the verse, "In the thickets of Arabia you shall lodge..." (Isa. 21:13). It is completely unclear how the midrash utilizes the term "Arabia." However, it is the anecdotes that provided the greatest wealth of historical possibilities. Much has been written comparing parallel traditions presented in this midrash, the Talmud, Avot de-Rabbi Natan and Josephus.[9] The historicity of the traditions mentioned is outside the scope of this paper. The focus here is on the inconsistencies in the anecdotes and whether this can aid in determining when they were included in the midrashic work.

### D. Who was Abgar?

In the anecdotes found in section 1:1 it is obvious that material was added at various times. This is seen both through language and thematic development.[10] In section 1:5 it is also obvious that, aside from the historical description, there is material imposed on the anecdotes, totally refocussing their intent. The addition of the persona of Abgar gives different meaning to the anecdotes. As the focus shifts to Abgar,

presented as Yohanan Ben Zakkai's adversary, the question arises as to the identification of this character. Such an identification would provide a clue as to the possible time when this story was incorporated, as well as reasons for including it in the anecdote.

Yet a problem arises with Abgar. He goes by a few different names. At first he appears as 'Abgar.' As one of the four generals mentioned in 1:5, he is in charge of Arabia. However, at the end of 1:5, when he meets his doom, he is called Amgar. In the printed edition, this person is continually refered to as Pangar. Buber is aware of this and says that all three are possible names of this one general.[11] The linguistic relation between Abgar and Amgar seems clear. The problem arises in the shift to Pangar. Were these truly three names of the same person, or are they different characters? If they differ, are they historical or mythical figures?

Abgar appears to have been the ruler of Edessa, a city in what today is known as Turkey. There were eleven rulers named Abgar in this area, dating from 94 BCE to 244 CE. There are two likely candidates for the 'Abgar' mentioned in Eikhah Rabbah. The first possibility is Abgar V (4 BCE - 7 CE, 13-50 CE), who was the focus, according to Church Fathers, of a series of correspondences with Jesus.[12] According to the stories, this Abgar accepted the teachings of a Christian preacher named Addai.[13] The second possibility is Abgar IX (179-216 CE), a convert to Christianity.[14] The relation of each monarch to Christianity is reason enough to view the use of the name in the

anecdote as an anti-Christian polemic.

The question of dating the material remains unanswered. How well-known was the character of Abgar among Jews? How well-known was the city of Edessa? Apparently, the city chronicles recount an order to erect a convent on the site of a synagogue in 411 CE.[15] The Edessa Jews are also said to have fought on the side of the Persians in their battle against the Byzantine emperor in 610-642 CE. There is also mention of an attempt to build a mosque on a synagogue site in 825 CE, as well as the expulsion of the Jews from Edessa by Crusaders in 1098 CE.[16] Any of these incidents, or rumored incidents, are sufficient cause for including Abgar in the midrash.

Greater problems develop with the names Amgar and Pangar. Amgar may be no more than a linguistic variation of Amgar, since both 'b' and 'm' are labials. Pangar is another matter entirely. The only mention of Pangar is in Eikhah Rabbah.[17]

The importance of the name in the midrash is obvious. It is the only general mentioned by name. In fact, the midrash makes a point of stressing the name:

> "With regard to the general of Arabia two teachers differ as to his name, one declaring it was Killus, and the other Pangar."[18]

Buber even has a different name for Killus, 'Ilem.[19]

There exists a possibility that each of these names carried a symbolism, a pun beyond the apparent name. Killus might be an extension of the mention in section 1:3. Referring to Ex. 32:18, the story of the golden calf, R. Aha comments: "It is the joyous voice of

idolatry (gol gilus ʿavodah zarah) that I hear."[20] Hence, the relationship between gilus as the opposition to Jewish belief has been established at an early point in the midrash.[21] 'Ilem could be "the mute one," a possible reference to the Christian God, or a Christian disciple. Perhaps, this name may have been 'Eylam "their God(s)."

Abgar could mean a variety of things. If this story is taken to be an anti-Christian polemic, Abgar can be read as 'Av ger, "father of the convert." Amgar read as 'Em ger, "mother of the convert," would also be consistent with this. Pangar then becomes a bilingual pun brought in at a later time: pan (all) ger, "all proselytes."[22] Pangar could be used either against Moslems or Christians. To confuse matters more, one can read the original name Abgar as an anti-Moslem polemic as well. There exists a possibility that this name was pronounced "'Aqbar," the Moslem description of the Deity.[23]

### E. The Mother and Her Seven Sons

The last series of anecdotes in chapter one also raises a question that could aid in dating the particular material. These are the anecdotes of section 1:16, specifically the mother and her seven sons. Here she is called Miriam bat Tanḥum; elsewhere this same story carries other names, such as Maryam, Hannah, or Shamone.[24] A study of the evolution of the mother's name would shed light on the time period in which the story was included in Eikhah Rabbah.

All the material mentioned here needs greater study. The language(s) used in the midrash as well as the historical references could provide clues as to the dating of Eikhah Rabbah. It is the historical allusions within the various anecdotes that are, simultaneously, most enticing and enigmatic. If it is accepted that the placement of these allusions is not accidental, the next step would be to determine possible reasons for their inclusion in the work. A study of the factors mentioned above could help determine how recent some of the material is, and possibly where and why the material in question found its way into the midrash.

## SECTION FOUR

## THE USE OF BIBLICAL VERSES

Throughout the first chapter of Eikhah Rabbah biblical verses are quoted in a straightforward manner. They are used both to prove a point, as well as to develop a point tied into the text of Lamentations. The biblical verses may be used for straight exegesis, or can be applied as proof of an extensive anecdote.[1] The verses from Lamentations are also illustrated directly in the same manner as verses from other biblical books.

However, there are a number of places in Chapter One that are exceptional in the use of biblical verses because the meaning of the verse is changed through the midrash. It is their sparsity which makes these verses stand out. This chapter will analyze several examples of such verses occurring in Chapter One of Eikhah Rabbah, within two categories: A) general biblical verses used in the midrash, and B) verses from Lamentations whose meaning has changed as a result of the midrash.

### A. The Utilization of General Biblical Verses

The first example of a biblical verse having its meaning changed occurs at the very beginning of the chapter. The verse is Deut. 1:12 "How can I alone bear your burden." This verse is used to show one nuance of the word eikhah. In the biblical text it is a complaint voiced by Moses, unable to bear the leadership

of a complaining nation by himself. In the midrash the meaning is changed, putting Israel in a positive light:

> "Similarly, Moses beheld Israel in their glory and and happiness and exclaimed, 'How can I myself alone bear your cumbrance!'"[2]

Perhaps the favorable perspective comes from the preceding verses in Deuteronomy: "Adonai your God has increased you, and today you are as numerous as the stars. May Adonai, the God of your ancestors, multiply you a thousandfold, and bless you as He promised you" (Deut. 1:10-11). Clearly these verses allude to the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, and are drawn upon for their imagery. The allusion to the covenant in the preceding verses makes it possible to use Deut. 1:12 as part of the covenant/infidelity/exile imagery that forms an intricate part of Eikhah Rabbah section 1:1.

In Eikhah Rabbah section 1:16, there are two instances of biblical verses being given new meaning, both examples occur in the anecdotes. The first example is Ps. 113:9, "He sets the childless woman in her house as a joyous mother of children." In the anecdote concerning the mother and her seven sons, the part quoted is "a joyous mother of children." This is used in reference to the mother, Miriam bat Tanḥum, committing suicide after the murder of her seven sons.[3] The difference between the original use of the verse and its appearance in the anecdote is the irony with which it is used, the woman's death representing her rejoicing. It is quite evident that her death does not represent some type of salvation since the prooftext is

immediately followed by "the Holy Spirit says: 'for these things I weep.'"

The second occurance of changing the meaning of a biblical verse in the anecdotal section of Eikhah Rabbah 1:16 occurs in the story of Miriam bat Nakdimon. The change in meaning of the verse is self-evident in the anecdote:

> "It is related of Miriam, the daughter of Nakdimon, that the rabbis allowed her five hundred gold dinars daily to be spent on her store of perfumes. Nevertheless, she stood up and cursed them, saying, 'Make such a [paltry] allowance for your own daughters!' R. Aha said: We responded with Amen! R. Eleazar said: May I not live to behold the consolation [of Zion] if I did not see her gathering barley from beneath horses' hoofs in Acco; and I quoted this verse in connection with her, 'If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock and feed thy kids' (S.S. 1:8) - read not gediyotayikh' ('thy kids') but gewiyotayikh ('thy bodies')."[4]

It would have sufficed to let the prooftext stand as is. The midrash on this verse contains numerous references to a shepherd (God) and the flock. Song 1:8 fits in well as a reproach to Israel, basically telling them to "return to the fold" as Miriam bat Nakdimon should have done. In addition, the

adjacent verses in Song of Songs chapter one contain images paralleling those of the anecdote: 1) wealth and 2) perfume.

What, then, is the purpose of the pun that changes the meaning of Song 1:8? The purpose of the anecdote, as with the others in this section, is to show the horrors that occured during the destruction. Song 1:8 cannot convey this horror unless the pun is added. With the addition of the pun "bodies," this anecdote develops from the previous one. The anecdote concerning Marta, the woman with delicate feet, who also suffered from excessive materialism concludes with the prooftext Deut. 28:56, "She who is so tender and delicate among you, who would not venture to place her foot on the ground for tenderness and delicateness." Left out is the continuation as to how this woman will turn away from her family, and indeed, will even consume her children due to the suffering inflicted by the enemy. With the addition of the rest of Deut 28:56, "she shall eat them for want of all things secretly," the pun on Song 1:8, "feed thy flock," is highlighted. The woman does not feed her flock, rather, she feeds on them, hence the pun. In addition, the wordplay effectively delivers the intended message of hopelessness, not redemption, which would be the simple midrashic reading of Song 1:8.

A different type of prooftext interpretation occurs in Eikhah Rabbah section 1:19. The prooftext in question is Jer. 31:20a "Erect markers, set up guideposts, bear in mind the highway, the road you have traveled."[5] The midrash sets out to interpret each part of this verse. By way of a pun on tsyn, the markers

(tsiyyunim) become mitsvot through which Israel excels and is distinguished (**metsuyyanim**). The surprise comes in the interpretation of guideposts (tamrurim), taken to be the destruction of the Temple. No explanation for this interpretation is provided.[6] The result interpreting the destruction of the Temple in this way is that the hurban takes on a positive meaning. It is a necessary prelude to repentance and redemption. The surprise in Eikhah Rabbah section 1:19 is not the changing of prooftext meaning, but the insertion of a unique element, hurban as a positive symbol. The destruction symbolizes God's punishment out of love, with the hope that Israel will repent. This positive view of the destruction strengthens the message already present in Jer. 31:20, most powerfully and unexpectedly.

### B. The Utilization of Lamentations Verses

While the biblical book of Lamentations carries its own message of the destruction of Jerusalem, the midrash on Lamentations does not always have the same intention. This is evident in a number of Lamentations verses given different meanings in Eikhah Rabbah. Again, these verses are striking because they are so few in number.

The first example of a Lamentations verse given new meaning is Lam. 1:1, specifically the phrase, "has become as a widow." Whereas in the biblical text the meaning is clear, a different

perspective is added in the midrash. It is interesting that the new meaning comes after the midrash on this particular portion of the verse, in the anecdotal section. By way of the last anecdote the view of widowhood is changed;[7] no longer lacking potency, the widow is given intelligence and independence, insuring her survival.

In Eikhah Rabbah section 1:5 it is again the anecdotes that change the meaning of the verse "Her foes have become the head, her enemiesare at ease; for Adonai has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgression" (Lam. 1:5). In this case, the inclusion of Amgar, lends a different interpretation to, "her foes have become the head."[8] Through the imagery in the anecdotes, it is evident that while the foes have reached the apex of their conquest, they are in for a mighty fall. Because of the anecdotes, verse 1:5 is no longer a lamentable state, but a temporary situation which will be righted.

Eikhah Rabbah section 1:17 changes the theme of the verse, paralleling what occurs in 1:5. Lam. 1:17 forthrightly states "she has none to comfort her." Yet in the midrash, there is a clear intent to change the meaning to the opposite conclusion: she does have someone to comfort her. In the words of R. Levi:

> "Wherever it is stated 'there is none' it
> is indicated that there would be in the future."[9]

Just in case this is not clear, a series of prooftexts are provided: Sarah was barren (Gen. 11:30) and yet she had a child (Gen. 21:1); and Hannah was barren (I Sam 1:2) yet she, too, had a son (I Sam. 2:21). The temporary nature of 'none' is applied

as well to the relationship between Israel and God the Redeemer. Israel has no one caring for her in Jer. 30:17 and yet the redeemer is coming (59:20). The conclusion of this section shows that verse 1:17 cannot stand as is:

> "...'There is none to comfort her,' but she will have [someone to comfort her] later, as it is said, 'I, even I, am He that comforteth you' (Isa. 51:12)."[10]

The thematic change in meaning is the same one applied to verse 1:5, the negative situation presented in the Lamentations text is a temporary state. What Eikhah Rabbah section 1:5 alludes to is stated clearly in section 1:17; "she will have later," in other words, the best is yet to come.

Lamentations 1:10, when read in the Hebrew, is ambiguous. Yado parash tsar does not have a subject clearly spelled out. The accepted translation is "the foe has spread out his hand." However, it can also be construed as "His (God's) hand has spread out the foe." Section 1:9 uses the ambiguity to develop the latter interpretation of the verse.[11] In this particular case, it is not a matter of making the text fit the midrashic meaning, but of taking advantage of the opportunity presented in the biblical text to develop a different perspective.

The text of Lamentations provides ample opportunity for midrashic interpretation which completely contradicts, obviates the pshat meaning of the biblical text. Yet Eikhah Rabbah takes advantage of this opportunity only in a very few instances. It is noteworthy that the anecdotes are responsible for change in

meaning in about half the instances where such changes occur. The anecdotes are a heavy-handed way of delivering a message, yet their influence on the verses is quite subtle. The changes in textual meaning do not take place in a vacuum. They depend on themes and images in surrounding sections of the midrash. Where the midrash does change the meaning of the text, or of prooftexts, it is in order to develop one of the major themes of the work: the present state is temporary, redemption will come.

## SECTION FIVE

## AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED VERSES

### A. Chapter 1, Verse 1

**"How she sits solitary, the city that was full of people, she has become as a widow; she that was great among nations, a princess among states, is become a tributary."** (Lam. 1:1)

1. **"How"** The midrash on this opening verse of Lamentations consists of almost one-third of the material on Chapter One. Elements found throughout Eikhah Rabbah come into play in this opening verse.

The midrash begins by looking at the very first word eikhah. The use of this word in three different instances is examined. This is developed by R. Levi through an analogy of a matron and three groomsmen,[1] each of whom saw her in a different state: honor/covenant (Moses),[2] infidelity (Isaiah) and disgrace/exile (Jeremiah). The prooftexts associated with each contains the word eikhah.

The second part, which is absent in Soncino, also deals with the word eikhah but the message is delivered through the use of puns, dividing eikhah into 'yeh koh. R. Elazar uses Gen. 15:5, "...thus will be your seed." which contains the word koh (thus), and R. Yohanan uses Ex. 19:3, "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob," which also has the word koh. Both verses deal

with the continuation of the pledge of covenant and develop the theme raised earlier with Moses seeing Israel in a state of honor.

The theme of infidelity is developed next,[3] again through a pun. R. Nehemiah states that eikhah connotes jealousy and gives as proof Gen. 3:9, "Adonai called out to man and said to him: 'Where are you," which contains the word 'ayekah (where are you).[4] This verse carries out the theme of infidelity because man has just disobeyed God and eaten the forbidden fruit.

The theme of disgrace is developed by R. Yehuda.[5] While the prooftext, Jer. 8:8, "How do you say: 'We are wise and the law of Adonai is with us'" employs the word eikhah, the use of wordplay continues with the explanation that eikhah means tokhahah[6]. In this prooftext, disgrace is complete because Israel has utterly rejected God's word.

Disgrace, implying exile, is now developed in the midrash. Israel was exiled due to her sins, a common theme in Lamentations Rabbah. Yet here, in Ben Azzai's explanation, the sins are evident in the numerical values of the letters making up the word eikhah.[7] R. Levi totals the numerical value of eikhah to come up with the 36 ordinances of the Torah that Israel transgressed.[8]

2. **"Sits solitary"** With the midrash on the word eikhah complete, the second and third words of Lamentations are scrutinized. Structurally, this is done in the same manner as above: 1) analogy, 2) puns, and 3) numerical value of the words in question.

The analogy is between Israel and a prince and contains a pun on badad (solitary). As long as each obeys the king they are clothed in fine clothes (bedudim), once they disobey the ruler, each is clothed in exile's garments (bedudim). The numerical play is the one that had appeared earlier in Soncino. Israel disobeys the 10 commandments which carries the numerical value of the word badad (solitary).

Another analysis of the word badad is taken up in the next section. This is carried out in the same manner as eikhah was examined at the very beginning of the chapter, through comparisons with the usage of the word elsewhere. The prooftexts used are Deut. 33:28, "Israel dwells in safety" (betakh badad) and Lev. 13:46, "All the days that the plague is in him...he shall dwell alone" (badad yeshev).[9] In the first instance, badad is used positively, in the second instance it is used negatively. So, too, in the analysis of the word eikhah, the first prooftext is twisted into a positive usage, "How can I alone bear your burden" (Deut. 1:12) whereas in the latter two prooftexts, Isa. 1:21, "How is the faithful city become a harlot;" Lam. 1:1, "How she sits solitary" "how" is utilized negatively. This method of employing the positive and negative aspect of a word or image is used in a few other sections in the midrash and is especially evident in 1:22 and proem 19.[10]

Another analogy concerning a king is brought to show how God chose to mourn for Israel. The different steps of mourning are proven through biblical verses. There is some association among the verses, as well as with previously presented material.

The first step, hanging a sackcloth, derived from Isa. 50:3, "I clothe the heavens with blackness, I make sackcloth their covering," ties in with the second step extinguishing a lamp "The sun and the moon are blackened, the stars withdraw their shine" (Joel 4:15). Both verses contain words using the root qdr (black). Isa. 50:3 brings with it the images of divorce and infidelity, discussed at the very beginning of the chapter. The third example, overturning a couch (Dan. 7:9) contains the Aramaic yetiv, tying in with Lam. 1:1 yashva. The fourth example, a mourner going barefoot, The clouds are the dust of His feet" (Nah. 1:3) is followed in Nah. 1:4, "He rebukes the sea and dries it," by an image from Isa. chapter 50 of God drying the sea. The fifth example, God rents his purple garment, uses Lam. 2:17, "Adonai has done that which He has devised" as a prooftext. There is a pun here, playing on bitsa' in Lam. 2:17 and mbz' in the introductory passage. In addition, the purple garments tie in with the the parable of the prince's clothes which precede this passage.[11] The sixth example, the mourner sits silently, brings another prooftext from Lamentations - 3:28, "Let him sit solitary and be silent." This verse also uses the words yashav badad. In addition, it contains the image of dust, as does the verse from Nah. 1:3. The final example is that of a mourner sitting and lamenting, using Isa. 22:12, "In that day did Adonai, the God of hosts, call to weeping and to lamentation, to baldness and to wearing sackcloth."[12] This unit does not make sense in the present context ending with the Isa. 22:12 prooftext. This segment fits better as a section of proem 24

which contains an extensive midrash on Isa. 22:12. The Pesikta de-Rav Kahane version, ending with Lam 1:1 would work better here. While fitting thematically, the unit is out of place here, inserted between two sections that deal with the alphabet.[13]

The new section dealing with the alphabet ponders why Lamentations were written alphabetically. Three reasons are given: 1) it is a "memory aid" for the mourners, 2) Israel was blessed from "a to z,"[14] and 3) Israel ended up by sinning from "a to z."

The next section asks the question of when Lamentations was written and gives two possibilities. This is followed by a discourse against idolatry using Jeremiah chapter 10 as the basis of comparing the worship of God to idol worship.[15] While it would be possible to use all the verses from Jer. 10:2-16, the author omits vss. 13 and 14.[16] Jer. 10:16, "Not like these is the portion of Jacob," the prooftext concluding this portion, is reminiscent of the very beginning of the chapter where Jacob is mentioned "Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob" (Ex. 19:3). All the prooftexts for this and the previous section are introduced with Aramaic terminology.[17]

3. **The city that was full of people"** In this section, the concentration is on <u>rabati</u> (full of), with R. Samuel attempting to show numerically how great this made Jerusalem. All this leads up to the prooftext of I Kings 4:20 that Judah and Israel are as numerous as the sands of the sea.[18]

The next section, brought by R. Eleazar, is a series of

anecdotes showing how "full of people" the city of Jerusalem was. The first anecdote, in Aramaic, deals with a merchant able to sell great quantities only in Jerusalem. The second anecdote,[19] in Hebrew, is a story of how fruitful the Jerusalemites are, married as minors, they are grandparents in their twenties, fullfilling Ps. 128:6, "And see you children's children. Peace be upon Israel." This verse also implies the redemption that awaits in the future. The third anecdote brought by R. Joshua of Siknin in the name of R. Levi shows not only the number of Jerusalemites, but also their wisdom by determining the unknown amount of an item through the portion set aside for the priests. This is followed by a number of examples of sacrifice and how this was used to determine the number of people in Jerusalem, including a reference to Agrippa's having done so as well, and coming up with a population doubling the one that escaped from Egypt.

Through these various stories, the attempt is to show how great the population of Jerusalem was not only in numbers, but in their abilities as well. This latter purpose becomes more apparent in the anecdotes that are presented later on in section 1:1.

**4. "Has become as a widow"** The intent of this section of the midrash is to show what is meant by "as a widow" (ke-'almanah). The first suggestion is that Jerusalem/Israel is an agunah,[20] the proof being Jer. 51:5, "For Israel is not widowed." R. Aibo then brings a series of verses, each having the feature "ke" (as).

The explanation is that Israel did not go to extremes in behavior and therefore was not punished in the extreme.

In the next step R. Hama bar ʿUkba deals with Israel as a yevamah, who uses this state to her advantage. This is followed by a parable of a king who wrote a bill of divorce for his wife but refused to give it to her, playing the divorce/no divorce state to his advantage.[21] This disagreement between R. Hama bar ʿUkba and the rabbis ultimately makes both Israel and God responsible for the exile, as will become apparent later in chapter one.

In the final step Israel is treated as a widow; she is widowed of 10 tribes but not of God. The proof for this is Jer. 51:5, the same prooftext used for the yevamah In concluding with this verse, the section on "as a widow" becomes a self-contained unit. This section carries an echo of the three levels at the beginning of the chapter: 1) covenant becomes the agunah, 2) infidelity becomes the yevamah/divorce game played here by both Israel and God, and 3) disgrace/exile becomes widowhood.

5. **"Great among the nations"** This section begins with a portion that is apparently out of place since it examines the section of the verse "full of people." In addition, it begins with davar 'aher.[22] First, the word rabati is explained as being full of wisdom as is seen in the prooftext I Kings 5:10, "Solomon's wisdom was great" (vaterev). Next, the word sarati which appears later in the verse is shown to be Torah using Prov. 8:16 as prooftext, "Princes rule by me [wisdom]" (bi sarim

yasru). While Buber acknowledges a problem with this portion, he feels emandations are unnecessary[23]. Still, it would make more sense to change the beginning of this section to an explanation of "great among nations, the princess among states" rather than "she that was full of people."

The following segment refers to "great among nations," explaining it as being great of knowledge. Perhaps this can serve as a transition between the previous section and the anecdotes that follow concerning the next part of the verse, "the princess among states." It can also stand alone as a short introduction to the anecdotes.

6. **"Princess among states"** Here begins a list of eighteen anecdotes on the wisdom of Jerusalemites. The anecdotes are mainly in Aramaic, though the introduction of R. Huna in the name of R. Yosi is in Hebrew. The anecdotes may be divided as follows:[24]

#1-3 deal with Jerusalemites away from home
    #2-3 are specifically of Jews in Athens
#4-11 are of Athenians in Jerusalem
    #4-7 deal with Athenians outsmarted by children
    #5-7 involve food
    #8-11 the Athenian is outsmarted by various adults
#12-18 are stories of rabbis
    #12-16 involve dream interpretations
    #12-13 R. Ishmael vs. a "kuti" (sectarian)
    #14-15 R. Akiva vs. his disciples (#14)[25]

#16 R. Eleazar vs. his disciples

#17 R. Joshua outsmarted by children

#18 R. Joshua ben Hananya outsmarted by widow and children[26]

#17-18 are in Hebrew

These anecdotes are apparently later additions to the text since they are mainly in Aramaic. The Hebrew ones may be found in the Babylonian Talmud.[27] The additions may have been made at different times since there are definite blocks of stories: Athenians, Samaritans, dreams, rabbis. The manner in which the anecdotes are presented not only illustrates the point of how clever the Jerusalemites are, but develops this issue. The Jerusalemites are smart, their rabbis are smart but their children and widows are smartest. The use of the widow at the end of this series neatly ties the anecdotes in with the previous portion "become as a widow." Here we see not only nostalgia for what once was but a reminder of what is: the widow (Israel) still has her wits about her, thereby changing the intent of the Lamentations verse. In addition to hope, this section also brings in much relief and levity to an otherwise somber topic.[28]

7. **"Is become a tributary"** R. Yohanan begins this section with a familiar statement on Israel's having transgressed the Torah. In this case, the Torah is represented by Sinai which has the same numerical value as lamas (tributary). This is the very same type of numerical wordplay found at the beginning of the chapter (eikhah) and also used to show Israel's sins. The

wordplay on lamas continues. R. Samuel shows that it is the inversion of semel representing an idol, R. Berekhiah shows that semel becomes a tributary and the rabbis pun with lemasuyei (melting?), a weakening of will on Israel's part. Here, too, the structure follows that found early in the chapter: 1) covenant equals Sinai, 2) infidelity is represented by idolatry, 3) disgrace/exile results from Israel's weakening, becoming a tributary.

The issue of idolatry is developed by R. ʿUqba. Using Jer. 11:15, "What has My beloved to do in My house," as a prooftext also strengthens the connection between infidelity and idolatry. The conclusion of Prov. 17:5, "He that rejoices at calamity shall not go unpunished," builds on the image of rejoicing in wickedness of Jer. 11:15, "When you do evil, then you rejoice."

As in the beginning of the chapter, here, too, there is a third section dealing with the alphabet, raising the familiar question of why is Lamentations written alphabetically, responding with the standard answer that Israel sinned "from A to Z." As in the first part, there is also a discussion involving R. Nehemiah and R. Yehuda (as well as the rabbis) on the nuance of Israel's guilt: was it a transgression or a sin and how extensive was it?

The section concludes with a comparison of prophecies presented as a consolation. Every time a prophecy of sin is predicted by Jeremiah, Isaiah has preceded it with a prediction of better times to come.[29] The comparison is carried out in the text by drawing on every verse in Lamentations Chapter One and comparing it with a verse from Isaiah. The verses are tied

together through a single word. The section concludes with the promise of return from exile, "Even them will I bring to My holy mountain and cause them to rejoice in My house of prayer." (Isa. 56:7).[30]

While the midrash on Verse One is carried out in many ways, it is apparent that not all the material is from the same time. certainly the anecdotes are a later addition. The material was crafted carefully as is apparent at the beginning, and this crafting appears both in the middle and end of Verse One. For example, the themes that repeat are the threefold themes of covenant, infidelity and exile. These themes are developed through the use of biblical verses as well as wordplays. Numerical equivalents are also used throughout this portion of the midrash.

## B. Chapter 1, Verses 9 - 13

The midrash on the middle verses of Lamentations Chapter One is not as extensive as that of verse 1. The greatest amount of material is found at the beginning of the chapter. Similarly, the most extensive midrash is on the beginning of the individual verse. As the reading progresses to the third or fourth phrase of a particular verse, the biblical material may only receive a one sentence explanation, as is the case in verse 13. Other verses are hardly mentioned, as with verse 12 or 20. The verses analyzed in this section vary from extensive midrashic explanations to hardly any.

**"Her uncleanliness was in her skirts, she did not remember her end; she has sunk horribly and has no comforter. See, Adonai, my misery. How the enemy makes itself great!"** (Lam. 1:9)

1. **"Her uncleanliness was in her skirts" (1:9)** The first part of the midrash on this phrase in an attempt to understand the word shuleha. It is understood as meaning hem, based on the usage of the word in Ex. 28:34, which describes priestly garments. Next, a connection is made between uncleanliness and priestly behavior in the saying of R. Berekhiah in the name of R. Abba bar Kahana.[1] The sins of the priests included being uncircumcised as is proven by Ezek. 44:7, "You have brought in foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in body, to

be in My sanctuary and to profane it."[2]

A second issue concerning the "uncleanliness in her skirts" which is examined is idolatry.[3] Here, the midrash contains explanations, anecdotes and a parable having to do with idolatry. It begins by naming a place outside of Jerusalem where idolatry and human sacrifice was practiced,[4] and discussing the significance of the name of this area based on Jer. 7:31, "They have constrcuted the high places of Tofet...to burn their sons and daughters in the fire." This is followed by an Aramaic description of the horrors of the child sacrifices taking place there. The priests are then brought into the midrash again,[5] in an anecdote about a man asked to sacrifice a child. The priest takes the only son who is studying, that is, the only one devoted to God.[6] This places the sin of idolatry and sacrifice both on the people and the priests, and expands the midrash to explain not only uncleanliness but to whose uncleanliness verse 9 refers. A Hebrew parable of a king and a matrona follows and is used to explain the sacrifice of children devoted to God leading to the verse Ezek. 16:20, "Moreover, you have taken your sons and daughters whom you have borne for Me, and you have sacrificed them to be consumed."

2. **"She has sunk horribly"** This is followed by a two word explanation, difficult to understand but taken to mean that she has sunk in trials.[7] The next section, still dealing with this phrase, is an anecdote about a funeral speech. The point of the speech is that "the demise of the righteous is more grievous

before the Holy One, blessed be He, than the 98 curses mentioned in Deuteronomy and the destruction of the Temple." This discourse is a self-contained unit in Aramaic, placed here as an elaboration on the tribulation of Jerusalem. The primary connection to verse 9 is the appearance of "pl'" in the prooftexts of the funeral speech.[8] Placed in the midrash, this discourse develops the point that God reluctantly places Israel through trials, not punishments. In addition, there is a new nuance here; God suffers with Israel. This is stressed by the conjunctive vav that introduces the next part of the verse "and the Holy Spirit cried out..."

3. **"See, Adonai, my misery** This section deals with various actions done to Israel contrary to God's laws, refering to the later portion of verse 9, "How the enemy makes itself great." The first prooftext used is Ps. 119:85 stating, "The insolent have dug pits for me, against your law." Israel suffers because of the actions of others. The insolent ones could be the enemies, or the sinful leaders addressed at the beginning of verse 9. Next comes a series of biblical verses that contradict each other. Some are associated not only by theme, but by words as well.[9] Each group of contradictory statements, raised by a different rabbi, refers to a theme previouly mentioned in verse 9. First is the case of children devoted to God, next comes the issue of sacrifice, finally there is an issue dealing with food, as the parable also makes mention of food.

While the preceding examples show contradictions in Torah

statements carried out by enemies, by their connection to previous material they imply that Israel bears some responsibility for her dilemma. This is not the case in the very last example brought by R. Berekhiah:

> "For is it not written, "Thou stretched out Thy right hand, the earth swallowed them" (Ex. 15:12)? "Right hand" signifies nothing else than an oath, as it is said, "The Lord hath sworn by His right hand" (Isa. 62:8). 'But to Thy people Thou gavest no burial'; hence [the cry] "Which is not according to Thy law."[10]

Here, it is very clear that God is the one not fulfilling His Torah. What seems to be developing in a comforting manner, implying salvation,[11] abruptly ends with the words repeated throughout this section: it is not according to the Torah. Perhaps this is meant to be read in conjunction with the next verse: Yado parash tsar. R. Berekhiah's comment, drawing on the image of God's right hand, indicate that the hand refered to in Lam. 1:10 is God's not the enemy's. This would make the next verse read: His hand (yado) has spread out the enemy (parash tsar).

**"The foe has spread out his hand upon all her treasures. She has seen the nations enter her sanctuary, concerning whom You commanded that they should not enter Your assembly."** (Lam. 1:10)

**4. The foe has spread out his hand" (1:10)** The first part of the midrash on verse 10 is a continuation of the theme raised in the previous verse, the contradiction of the Torah. The explanation begins with a couple of simple explanations that are absent in the Soncino version. "Foe" is explained as being Ammon and Moab, "her treasures" are the Torah as is seen through the connection with Ps. 19:11, "They [the laws] are more desirable than gold."

**5. "She has seen the nations enter her sanctuary"** The continuation of the theme of Torah contradiction is stressed with this part of the verse.[12] Now that the foes have been identified as being Ammon and Moab, they become part of "the nations" plundering the sanctuary.[13] Unlike the other nations, Ammon and Moab have a particular purpose in their plundering; they wish to defile the Torah and through this to contradict Deut. 23:4, "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of Adonai." The point is repeated in the parable of the king's slave who has a singular purpose in plundering the king's palace during a fire. The conclusion that the slave is Ammon and Moab attempting to contradict the Torah is verbatim with the preceding material.[14]

The next part develops the lineage from Lot to his descendants, Ammon and Moab. This is done in four steps: 1) Four benefits bestowed on Lot by Abraham, 2) Lot's descendants attempted to repay the Israelites with evil, 3) four occasions where it is said that Ammon and Moab cannot enter the assembly of God's people,[15] and 4) four prophets who sealed the doom of Ammon

and Moab. This final prophetic section provides comfort for the people, knowing that the enemies will be punished in the end. It also provides closure for this section which begins with Lot, makes reference to Sodom and Gemorrah, "When He overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelled" (Gen. 19:29); and ends with the prediction that Ammon and Moab will receive the same fate as Sodom and Gemorrah, "Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gemorrah" (Zeph. 2:9).

It is apparent that each of the four steps should contain four prooftexts. The second step contains only two. In the version that appears in Bereshit Rabbah on Gen. 13:5,[16] there are four proofexts for step two, one of the texts is Lam. 1:10. It is also interesting that the version in Bereshit Rabbah can be tied in to this section of Eikhah Rabbah. This material in Genesis is preceded by mention of gold and silver in verse 13:2. In Eikhah Rabbah, verse 10, the material preceding this section makes reference to plundering gold and silver. Perhaps this reference, along with the appearance of verse 10 in the Bereshit Rabbah material, gave the redactor impetus to place the material in Eikhah Rabbah as well.

**"All her people sigh, they search for bread; they give their treasures for food to maintain themselves. See, Adonai, behold how abject I have become."** (Lam. 1:11)

6. **"All her people sigh, they search for bread" (1:11)**

This verse begins with a comparison of the first and second destructions, showing how much more severe was the suffering at the second destruction. The quote from Jer. 52:6 provides a tie with the passage just completed because it too mentions the number four, "In the fourth month, in the ninth day of the month, there was a severe famine in the city" (Jer. 52:6).

7. **"They give their treasures (for food)"** The extent of the suffering is shown through an anecdote. A golden basket was lowered for food. Each time a basket was returned with less food: first wheat, then barley, then straw,[17] finally, nothing was given in exchange for the golden basket.

The fact that both "treasure" and "gold" appear in this section is reminiscent of the beginning of Lam. 1:10 where the analogy is made between treasure and Torah. This in turn, gives Lam. 1:11 new meaning: the people are exchanging the sustenance of Torah for less worthy possession. To carry it further, in the first destruction only the people did this. The severity of the second destruction is due to the fact that the leaders were as guilty as the rest of the nation.[18]

8. **"To maintain themselves" (<u>lehashiv</u> <u>nefesh</u>)** The discussion here concerns the quantity of food necessary to remain alive. One rabbi claims it is one fig, another says it is one date.[19]

9. **"See, Adonai, behold how abject (<u>zolelah</u>) I have become"** R. Pinhas provides a story of two Ashkelon women in order to explain this portion of the verse.[20] While the introduction is

in Hebrew, the story is in Aramaic. The two women quarreled, one calling the other haughty. After they had made up, one said to the other that she forgave everything but that comment. This is analagous to Israel's saying, "See, Adonai, behold how abject I have become." This story focuses on the word zolelah taking it to mean gluttonous. This is made clearer by the comment following the story,[21] "If one has given and not taken is called zolelah, all the moreso the one who takes and does not give." The image of food that appears throughout this verse ties in nicely with the midrash on verse 9, where food represents the offers made through idolatry.[22]

**"May it not befall you who pass along the road. Behold, see if there is any pain like mine, which was dealt to me when Adonai afflicted me on His day of anger."** (Lam. 1:12)

10. **"May it not befall all you who pass along the road." (1:12)** While the material on this verse is very short, some of the themes raised before appear here as well. The first part of the verse is explained as being a word of caution from Israel to the nations to avoid Israel's fate. The warning, expressed in Aramaic, consists of two phrases that differ only in verb: mt' and 'ty.

11. **"You who pass along the road"** The Hebrew reads kol 'ovrei derekh. The explanation comes by way of a pun where 'ovrei means

transgressors and derekh refers to the Torah. The message that Israel has transgressed the Torah is at the heart of Eikhah Rabbah and has appeared constantly in the verses discussed above.

12. **"Behold, see if there is any pain..."** The warning from the earlier part of the verse is repeated here, again in Aramaic. The words take on the form of a complaint that God has been harsher in judging Israel than in judging other nations. This theme has already been raised in verse 9. This point is expanded in Soncino through an illustration of how long punishment lasted for various people:

> "The judgement of the generation of the flood lasted twelve months; the judgment of the Egyptians lasted twelve months; the judgment of Job lasted twelve months; the judgment of Magog will last twelve months; the judgment of the wicked in Gehenna lasts twelve months. [The judgment of] Nebuchadnezzar will last for three years and a half, and of Vespasian for a like period."[23]

It is unclear whether the last sentence refers to Israel's punishment, which would be in keeping with the midrash up to now, or if it is meant to offer consolation that Jeruslaem's destroyers will receive this punishment.

13. **"...which was dealt (ʿolal) to me"** The comparison between judgment on Israel and the nations is continued in this comment.

Once again, the point is made through a pun. God has been harsh in cutting off Israel's gleanings (ʿolal). This draws on the theme presented at the end of verse 9 that God's action contradicts the Torah since the gleanings are meant to be left in the fields.[24]

14. **"When Adonai afflicted me on His day of anger."** The comment is a reproach to Israel that repentance could have cooled God's anger.[25] The point of view presented here is that Israel, not God, is responsible for the severity of the punishment she received. This statement puts to rest the argument the theme developed in verse 10 that God is responsible for the decree against Israel and its severity.

**"From above He sent fire into my bones, He brought it down. He spread a net for my feet, He has taken me away. He has left me desolate and faint all day."** (Lam. 1:13)

15. **"From above He sent fire" (1:13)** The theme of this section is the practice of righteousness by heavenly and earthly creatures. It is introduced by a question put to R. Shmuel Bar Nahman by R. 'Ami. The discussion focuses on Ps. 71:19, "Your righteousness, Adonai, which reaches heaven above," ties into the present context because of the word "above." The imagery of above/below, or heavenly/earthly is found throughout verse 13.[26]

The necessity of doing righteousness is explained through

the use of Ezek. 10:2, "He spoke to the man dressed in linen saying: 'Go between the wheelwork, under the cherub, fill both your hands with coals of fire from between the cherubim, and hurl them against the city."[27] The commentary that follows is specifically on Ezek. 10:2-8. It is first pointed out that the term "he said" appears twice in Ezek. 10:2 (spoke/saying).[28] This is explained as being a hierarchy of orders given from God to the angel to the cherub. The order concerns handing over some coals. The process of doing so is detailed. First the coals are cooled off, then they are held by the angel Gabriel for three years in the hopes that Israel will repent. The words and image of the coals build directly on the end of verse 12 where God's anger would have "cooled off" had Israel repented. What develops in this section is that God waited patiently for Israel to repent. Gabriel held the coals for three years, approximating the amount of time Jerusalem was besieged.[29] To make the point of Israel's responsibility for the situation, R. Abba bar Kahana comments that survival of the heavenly and earthly depends on Israel's behavior.

The midrash turns back to Ps.71:19, "You have done great deeds, Adonai, who is like You?" God's great deeds are shown to be the "great lights" of heaven. The analysis of the verse from Ps. 71 is completed by looking at the phrase "who is like you," taken to be a display of God's justice. Justice challenges God by asking how God allows a human king to take "credit" for destroying the sanctuary. God responds by sending fire from above (Lam. 1:13) to destroy the sanctuary. God's

justice now becomes a face-saving measure. While the destruction was started by a human king, this important task must be God's responsibility. Once again, God carries out the punishment against Israel. This view is taken one step further by the Aramaic comment of R. Yehoshua in the name of R. Levi where Israel points out that the enemy could not have been victorious had not God carried out the judgment and destruction first.

16. **"He brought it down (vayirdenah)"** The meaning of the word vayirdenah is explored by a comparison with its use elsewhere. In Ps. 72:8, "May You rule from sea to sea," yrd means rule, in I Kings 5:4, "For he had dominion over the entire region on this side of the river," it carries the nuance of conquest.[30] The next explanation from the P.T. Taanith, chapter 4, refers to ploughing. This is followed by a prooftext from Judges 14:9, "He scraped it out into his hands," where yrd connotes scraping or gathering.[31] The final comment on yrd is a pun that God saw to it (r'h) that justice was carried out.[32]

17. **"He spread a net for my feet"** The intent of this section is to provide words of hope. Attention is given to the word 'feet' which is taken to be the feet of the messiah. The language in this section builds up on seeing (r'h) from the preceding verse. The wordplay is developed: "if you see benches full of Babylonians, look for (tsapeh) the feet of the messiah. Another comment in the same vein continues with the sight of Persian horses tied to Israelite graves, preceding the arrival of

the messiah.[33]

18. **"He has taken me away (ahor)"** Ahor is explained as being away from the monarchy and priesthood. This continues the theme explained more fully in verse 9, concerning the role of Israel's leaders resulting in her present state.

19. **"He has left me desolate"** This is taken to mean in a chaotic state.

20. **"And faint all day"** The one word explanation here is girdah, which is taken to be related to the executioner's axe. Perhaps it can also be related to grd evoking the scraping imagery from yrd, discussed above.

It is obvious that the each section of this midrash is not a separate element. The midrash carries over themes and images from verse to verse. At times they are obvious, at other times the connection is more subtle. The major theme in this set of verses is the responsibility for the destruction/punishment. While different points of view are presented, they draw on the same images, such as the garment. When worn by the sinful priests in verse 9, it is soiled, yet, the garment reapppears in verse 13 where the man clothed in linen is (Ezek. 10:2) carrying out the Divine will. Later additions, as with the funeral speech in verse 9 alluding to God's reluctant treatment of Israel, are made in order to clarify what may have been judged an unclear point. One technique used frequently in these verses is changing

the meaning of Lamentations. This is possible because the verses lend themselves to puns and grammatical wordplay, such as the numerous associations with yrd in verse 13. As pointed out earlier, there are instances where self-contained units are "forced" into the midrash. These may either elaborate a theme or bring in another perspective, as is the case with the funeral speech in section 1:9. All the techniques are ultimately used to explore, if not unanimously answer the question, who is to blame for Israel's plight. The redactor cannot seem to leave any one answer alone. After arriving at a response, there is an attempt to console Israel, and then the question begins again, albeit in shorter form.[34] The imagery contained in these middle verses is carried over to the following ones as well. Questions raised in the themes remain as well. For example, who bears responsiblity for Israel's fate? Why is the foe able to get away with so much? Different points of view raised throughout, and the conclusion of responsibility not made until the end of the chapter.

## C. Chapter 1, Verses 21 - 22

These two verses follow an extensive, detailed martyrology. As part of the martyrology, different reasons have been given for Israel's downfall, with Israel and her leaders receiving blame. The lack of leadership is tackled indirectly at the beginning of verse 21 in the example of Aaron's death.

The final two verses of Chapter One differ from the previous verses in mood. Whereas before the uppermost question was, "why did this happen?," the last two verses no longer deal with this issue. Instead, there is acceptance of the situation, followed by an impassioned demand for justice.

**"They have heard that I sigh, there is none to comfort me; all my foes have heard of my predicament and rejoiced for You have done this. You have brough on the day You warned of and they will be like me."** (Lam. 1:21)

1. **"They have heard that I sigh" (1:21)** Two aspects of this phrase are explained: 1) the reason for the sighing, and 2) who "they" are. The first explanation of the sighing is that it is a reaction to the death of Aaron.[1] The other explanations are dealt with in the midrash on later portions of the verse.

2. **"There is none to comfort me"** "Me" is taken to mean Moses and Eleazar, both mentioned as mourning for Aaron in the verse

(Num. 20:28) preceding the prooftext of Num. 21:1.

3. **"All my foes heard of my predicament and rejoiced"** This section returns to the explanation begun at the beginning of the verse. The stress is on "heard," and the word shm' appears in the prooftext as well as in the verse. The prooftext Num. 21:1 is a continuation of the prooftext used for the first portion of the verse, "The Canaanite king of Arad who lived in the south, heard that Israel came through Atarim; and he fought against Israel, taking some of them captive." A pun is made on the word 'atarim in Num. 21:1; it is interpreted as meaning "scouts" and Aaron is taken to be the leader. Since Aaron represents the priestly class, his death may be interpreted as the end of priestly leadership resulting in the "departure of the clouds of glory" mentioned in the midrash.[2] The loss of leadership makes Israel vulnerable, resulting in war and captivity, as is seen in the midrashic interpretation of Num. 21:1.

A second explanation of the rabbis is brought in and apparently refers to the entire verse. The foes heard the sighing, or Israel's predicament at the destruction of the Temple. This allowed them to capture the people of Israel who fled the destruction.

4. **"You have done this"** This phrase is explained through a parable of a king and his wife. On the one hand he demands that she cut off ties with her companions; on the other hand when he evicts her, he complains that no one else will take her in. The

parable, in Aramaic, concludes with the Hebrew phrase similar to one mentioned in the previous section - this eviction allowed Israel's enemies to capture the inhabitants who fled the destruction.[3] Israel's capture is illustrated through the use of Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, each of which refers to a different enemy at a different compass point.[4] In what appears to be a continuation of the parable, God accuses Israel of acting impudently. Israel responds by saying her misfortune is do to her following God's will. The conclusion is "it is Your (God's) doing" that Israel is in her predicament.[5]

5. **"You have brought on the day You warned of and they will be like me.** The comment here on kamoni, "like me in sorrow, unlike me in relief" serves as an introduction for verse 22.

**"Let all their evil come before You and deal with them as You have dealt with me for all my transgressions; for my sighs are numerous and my heart is faint."** (Lam. 1:22)

6. **:Let all their evil come before You"** (1:22) The midrash begins with a comment on the word "come," providing an Aramaic explanation similar to the last comment in verse 21: "Bring to them what You have brought on me."[6] The midrash on the rest of the verse will be an elaboration of this sentiment, as is seen by the next part of verse 22.

7. **"and deal with them..."** The same pun made in verse 12 concerning ʿolel is made here as well. The prooftext from Lev. 19:10, "Do not glean your vineyard," absent in Soncino, elaborates on the wish that Israel be treated differently than the enemies.

8. **"...as You have dealt with me for all my transgressions."** The wish for strictness in dealing with the enemies echoes the sentiment expressed earlier, in similar words, in verse 12.

9. **"For my sighs are numerous"** What follows is a comparison of verses that stylistically has appeared before in Eikhah Rabbah.[7] A series of biblical verse are presented to prove that Israel sins, is punished and is comforted through the same device. Each example has one word common to the sins, punishments and comforting. These differ slightly in the Buber and Soncino editions:

| Buber | Soncino |
|---|---|
| head | head |
| eye | eye |
| ear | ear |
| nose | nose[8] |
| mouth | mouth |
| tongue | tongue |
| hand | hand |
| heart | heart |
| foot | foot |

| Buber | Soncino |
| --- | --- |
| doubly | |
| he | he |
| this | this (zeh)[9] |
| fire | fire[10] |
| | there is (yesh) |
| | doubly |

A number of the prooftexts are taken from Lamentations. The Buber version ends with the acknowledgement that God will protect His people. The Soncino version, ending with the words of Isa. 40:1, "comfort ye, my people," is stronger in presenting a feeling of hope and consolation. Using Isa. 40:1 ties this portion of the midrash to the Ninth of Av, and the haftarah preceding it for Shabbat Nahamu. There is very little direct mention of the Ninth of Av throughout the proems and Chapter One.[11] In fact, this ending for verse 22 is probably the strongest connection between the midrash and the holiday, and is probably a later form of the midrash on verse 22.

It is expected that the chapter should end with words of consolation. What makes this so dramatic is that verse 22 forces the reader to think back to verses 9-13. This is accomplished through similarity in words and images, specifically, the recurrance of ʿolal and mainly by answering the accusation that God has contradicted the Torah. Verse upon verse is brought as evidence to show that there is no contradiction in the Torah; justice and righteousness will prevail.

## Notes to Section One

(pp. 35 - 53)

1. See for example vss. 1, 2, 3, 16, 19.

2. Section 1:16 gives a number of examples of haughty women. Prooftexts, especially ones from Ezek., Jer., and Isa., utilize this image as well.

3. In proems 21 and 22, idolatry is clearly the sin committed by the people. In proem 24, idolatry is brought in through God's jealousy of the idols.

4. Soncino, p. 66.

5. Soncino, p. 144. The pun is on tsiyyunim (way-marks) taken as ziyyunim (harlotry).

6. Soncino, pp. 106-7.

7. Soncino, p. 129.

8. Soncino, p. 129.

9. See, for example, 1:9, 13, 21. In section 1:2 the angels are given some of this responsibility.

10. See the analysis of verse 10, p. 102-3 below, for the role of Ammon and Moab.

11. Soncino, p. 107. Proem 15 alludes to God's weakened state as well, partially due to God's "old age." This means that all of God's miracles were performed in the past. Now that God is old, He is too weak to perform any more miracle's for Israel's sake.

12. Soncino, p. 135.

13. Soncino, p. 105. This is repeated verbatim in section 1:6, p. 106. God's going into exile with the children might balance the horrors children were subject to during the destruction. These horrors are alluded to in verse 1:9 where the destruction

of the mother and the young together is said to contradict the Torah. It is also detailed in the story of the mother and her seven sons in section 1:16.

14. See Soncino, p. 144.

15. Soncino, pp. 146-7.

16. Soncino, p. 24.

17. Soncino, p. 122.

18. There is a question if section 1:16 is indeed meant to provide a message of redemption. The discussion here centers on possibilities for the name of the messiah. Oddly enough, the messiah often carries the name of the leader of whichever rabbinic academy is presenting an opinion. If this is meant to be taken at face value, the message contradicts the sinful nature of haughtiness presented earlier in the same verse. Perhaps this is just a case of different material incidentally brought together; otherwise it is to be read as a satire.

19. Soncino, p. 136.

20. Buber, p. 76. This material is absent in Soncino.

21. Soncino, p. 124. Buber, p. 78 presents a similar comment by R. Huna.

22. See the textual analysis of verse 1:9-13 pp. 98-111 below for details. These verses also contain prooftexts drawing on the image of water versus drought, in the context of reward and punishment.

23. Soncino, p. 125.

24. Soncino, in 1:17, p. 139. Notice also the prooftexts in Ps. 33:4, the floods sing God's praise, reminiscent of the prooftexts used in verses 9-13; and in Gen. 7:12, the rain falls for forty days and nights. The destructive power of water is apparent in the flood image. This destructive side is played out in section 1:16 as well.

25. Soncino, p. 130.

26. Soncino, p. 127.

27. See in Soncino, pp. 66-7, the passage attributed to R. Berekhiah in the name of R. Abdimi of Haifa. See also below, p. 89. There is also a reference to garments in the anecdotes of section 1:1, in which schoolchildren manage to steal an Athenian's clothes. See below, pp. 56-7.

28. He originally was a farmer, sold his equipment to buy clothes for his children and set off for a destination referred to as "that place," in Soncino pp. 136-7. This part alone is reminiscent of the role played by garments in section 1:2. It is apparent that this man has purchased the garments of exile.

29. Soncino, p. 137.

30. Soncino, pp. 92-3.

31. Soncino, p. 93. This is reminiscent of the image of a weakened God in section 1:6 and a weak/old God in proem 15.

32. See the detailed textual analysis, p. 101, below, for the interpretation that 1:10 refers to God's hand.

33. This explanation is absent in the Soncino. Notice how in this explanation water is also used for redemption.

34. In Soncino, the image develops with the parable of a king praised by mute subjects through hand signals, but prone to complaints by the people who can talk. This parable is used earlier in Buber (1:16) p. 79, where the dominant image is water.

35. As discussed earlier in this section, pp. 42-4, the image of day and night is found throughout this midrash. As in other midrashim, it represents the time preceding redemption, night being the bleakest point before the promised dawn.

36. The image of straw used for food recurs in section 1:11.

37. It appears again in the anecdotes of 1:16 where the son of Doeg ben Joseph is a victim if cannibalism.

38. The image of gold, silver, treasures also occurs throughout

the chapter. Wealth is not always positive, as it can supercede Torah. (See the anecdotes in section 1:16, pp. 67-9, below, and how the rabbis give in to the material requests of Jerusalem's noble women. This is discussed in part B, pp. 37-8, above.) The mention of wealth, especially gold, brings to mind the golden calf, a major symbol of idolatry in this chapter.

39. This is reminiscent of what R. Tsadok needed in order to be able to each Torah, as was seen earlier in this section, p. 51.

40. Perhaps this is due to a pun in 1:14, where the phrase I am unable to stand" containing the word 'ukhal (able) may also be punned as 'okhel (food).

41. Soncino, 1:14:23, p. 123. This is followed by Ps. 109:24 which begins, "My knees bend due to fasting."

42. So Buber, p. 79 where the comment is made on Lam. 1:14. In Soncino, p. 124, Huna's comment is in reference to Gen 2:7, "man became a living soul." The elaboration on day and night is absent.

## Notes to Section Two

(pp. 54 - 70)

1. Soncino, p. 73.

2. Soncino, pp. 72-4.

3. Soncino, pp. 72-6.

4. Soncino, p. 74.

5. Soncino, p. 76.

6. Soncino, p. 76.

7. Buber and Soncino differ in the order of these anecdotes. See below, Section 5, note 24, p. 131.

8. Buber places this story among other stories involving children. Soncino places it after a story about a temple priest and preceding an anecdote about an Athenian who came to study philosophy in Jerusalem and yet was outwitted by his handicapped slave. The Soncino placement is preferable because of the imagery upon which it draws.

9. Soncino, p. 78.

10. In Soncino the teacher is simply called R. Yoḥanan.

11. The image of the garment is detailed in Section One. See above, p. 46-8 .

12. Soncino inserts a story of a child between the tailor and the priest. This story appears in a better location, among the children stories, in Soncino.

13. Soncino, p. 77.

14. In the Soncino version, R. Yoḥanan is mentioned in place of R. Akiva. Buber, p. 54, note 142, points out that the Palestinian

Talmud agrees with his manuscript.

15. Soncino, R. Jose ben Halafta. According to Buber, p. 54, note 147, the parallels in the Palestinian Talmud and Bereshit Rabbah have the same tradent. In B.T. Berachot, the tradent is R. Ishmael and this anecdote is a continuation of his dealings with the min, the sectarian.

16. B.T. Erubin 53b uses the story in a series of anecdotes similar to the ones in Eikhah Rabbah 1:1. In Erubin fun is being made of Galileans speech.

17. Note also that the order of stories is reversed in B.T. Erubin 53b. In the midrash, the placement of the widow at the end "saves the best for last." The incident with the girl at the well paralleling Rebekah and Eliezer in the Torah does not occur in the Talmud. Its placement in the midrash highlights the comment on "chief in Torah." The midrash also contains an additional story about a child and a covered dish which is not in the Talmud. This story carries the same imagery as the widow anecdote, as well as another short incident, both of which serve as a connection between the story of the boy giving directions and the story of the girl at the well. (See Soncino p. 84-5.) The image of the widow in the R. Joshua story provides a strong message of self-preservation, a message diluted by the additional, later anecdotes, such as the Athenian stories.

18. This is pretty much the same version as in B.T. Gittin 56a, including the puns explaining the men's names. The number of years Jerusalem could have been supplied with food varies and is completely missing in Soncino.

19. In B.T. Gittin 56a he is called 'Abb'a Siqr'ah.

20. The Buber version has ben Zakkai confronting ben Batiyah on the problem of starvation. This is present in Gittin but it is absent in Soncino.

21. The parallel in B.T. Gittin 56b gives additional prooftexts.

22. In Soncino, he is referred to as Pangar. This same character is also called Abgar at the beginning of section 1:5 in Buber. This exchange is missing in the talmudic version.

23. In B.T. Gittin 56b, he asks for Yavneh, the wise men, and the descendants of Rabban Gamliel. This leads to a criticism that he

should have asked that Jerusalem be spared. Apparently this criticism was taken to heart by the writer of the present version. See Saldarini, Escape, pp. 193-4.

24. This incident is absent in the talmudic account.

25. Soncino interprets this as being a game. Perhaps it is closer to the hand multiplication taught in Palestinian schools under Ottoman rule.

26. Saldarini, Escape, p. 189.

27. Saldarini, Escape, p. 202-3.

28. See Section Three, pp. 74-7.

29. See Buber, p. 54, note 142. Soncino follows this as well.

30. This psalm first appeared extensively in verse 2. It's mention in verse 16 is also omitted in Soncino. See Buber, p. 79, note 383. Much of the material on verse 16, preceding the anecdotes, is absent in Soncino.

31. See Buber, p. 81, note 403.

32. Vespasian is cursed when mentioned. Unlike the anecdotes in section 1:5, where he is merely a foil for Yohanan ben Zakkai, his role here is that of pure evil. In this story in B.T. Gittin 57b, no mention is made of any ruler.

33. In B.T. Gittin 58a, the children of Ishmael ben Elisha.

34. See also B.T. Gittin 57b, Pesikta Rabbati piska 43.

35. The irony in this story is that the mother is not murdered, thereby not contradicting Lev. 22:28, "...you shall not kill it and its young both in one day," quoted by Miriam. This is the opposite of the point made in verses 9 and 10 that the enemy contradicts the Torah. The other irony is the inverse meaning given to Ps. 113:9, "He places the childless woman among her household as a joyful mother of children."

36. This appears in B.T. Yoma 38b, with variations.

37. Also called Miriam, though, according to Naomi Cohen, "The Theological Stratum of the Martha b. Boethus Tradition: An Explication of the Text in Gittin 56a," Harvard Theological Review 69, (1976) pp. 187-195, Martha is preferable. Still, the image of Miriam (bitter waters) should not be overlooked in a midrash dealing with tears, sea, water and related imagery.

38. According to Soncino, she was dragged to Lod. This ties in with the ben Zakkai story asking that the gate to Lod remain open so people could escape. On the other hand, it may just be that Lod was used as a detention/refugee camp.

39. Nakdimon was mentioned in the beginning of the ben Zakkai stories as being one of the wealthy men of Jerusalem. Buber, p. 86, note 431, points out that this story does not appear in his manuscript and he places it in the text based on the printed edition of the midrash.

40. This is the wording in Soncino.

41. Shaye Cohen, Destruction, p. 23, claims this midrash "raises the heights and lowers the depths."

## Notes to Section Three

(pp. 71 - 78)

1. Buber, "Introduction," pp. 9-10. Cohen, "Destruction," p. 19, believes it was written between the fifth and seventh century. Moshe Herr, "Lamentations Rabbah," Encyclopedia Judaica, v. 10, (1972), col. 1378, suggests the late fifth century as a possible date for redaction.

2. See Buber, "Introduction," pp. 8-21.

3. In his manuscript, Buber, p. 66, note 261, has what he believes is a scribal translation of the Latin. He states that the Latin is the proper reading, since these would be the words used to greet an emperor.

4. See Soncino, p. 98, including n. 3 which explains that Qeteb is the demon of pestilence.

5. It was based on this reference to Ishmael that Zunz, Gottesdienstlichen, Albeck, (ed.) Hebrew edition, (1954), pp. 78-9, dated this midrash to the second half of the 7th century, a notion later rejected by others.

6. Soncino, p. 101.

7. Soncino, p. 124.

8. It is interesting to note that both verse 1:15 and 1:16 mention Arab/Arabia. Perhaps a new question should be posed in regards to these verses: What did the redactor think Arab/Arabia meant?

9. See for example: Saldarini, "Escape" pp. 189-204; Baer, "Yerushalayim" pp. 169-180.

10. See Section Two, above, pp. 54-60, for a detailed analysis of the stories in 1:1.

11. Buber, p. 65, note 247.

12. P. von Rohden, "Abgar," Real-Encyclopädie, v. 1, (1893), p.

94. He notes that Abgar V is also confused with Abgar IX.
13. Eliyahu Ashtor, "Edessa", Encyclopedia Judaica, v. 6, (1972) col. 366.

14. See especially, Baer, "Yerushalayim" pp. 171-75.

15. Ashtor, "Edessa," col. 367.

16. Ashtor, "Edessa," col. 367.

17. Jacob Levy, "Pangar," Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim, v. 4, (1924), pp. 58-9.

18. Soncino, p. 101. Buber reads Abgar instead of Pangar.

19. Buber, p. 65.

20. Buber, p. 62.

21. Qilus does take on a positive connotation in section 1:16, (Buber p. 79), where, at the beginning of creation, the waters sing the praises of God. As the explanation continues, Man does not take part in this praise, restoring the negative nuance to qilus.

22. I thank Carl S. Ehrlich for suggesting this possible reading of the name Pangar.

23. von Rohden, "Abgar" p. 94. The Greek version reads "Akbarus."

24. Variations of this story appear in II and IV Maccabees, B.T. Gittin 57b, and according to Gerson Cohen, "Hannah and Her Seven Sons," Encyclopedia Judaica, v. 7 (1972) col. 1271, in Syriac Christian accounts as well. A study of these various stories of the woman and her seven sons might, incidentally, indicate an aural connection between "Hannah" and "Chanukah."

## Notes to Section Four

(pp. 79 - 86)

1. See, for example, the anecdotes on 1:16:47, 48 and 50 in Soncino, pp. 128-9 and 133. The biblical verse culminating the anecdotes is introduced by the words "I quote this verse in connection with her..." or "to fulfill what is said." This style is found throughout Chapter One and is used to show that the horrors of destruction were predicted in the Bible.

2. Soncino, p. 66.

3. In Soncino, p. 133, there is a variation: The woman commits suicide fulfilling Jer. 15:9, "She who bore seven is forlorn." This is followed by Ps. 113:9, which is voiced by a Bat Qol.

4. Soncino, p. 129.

5. Jer. 31:20 continues, "Return maiden of Israel, return to these towns of yours." Clearly the intention of this prooftext is to bring about repentance as preparation for redemption.

6. Perhaps there is an intended pun on the bitterness of the destruction, derived from tamrurim.

7. The relationship of R. Joshua ben Hananyah's anecdote to the phrase "has become as a widow" is discussed in greater detail in the Section Two. See above, pp. 58-60. It is this author's belief that at one point they were in closer proximity and have direct bearing on each other.

8. These stories are also discussed in detail in the Section Two. See above, pp. 61-5. In summary, the concentration on ben Zakkai's competition with Amgar, the rabbi's curse on Amgar, and the fulfillment of this curse, shows that the phrase "her foes have become the head" is only a temporary state.

9. Soncino, p. 141. This entire section ties in thematically with the notion presented earlier (vss. 1:9-10) of contradictions in the Torah. Though the examples in verse 17 can be taken as contradictions, instead they are shown to be part of a careful Divine plan.

10. Soncino, p. 142.

11. See the detailed analysis of this verse, p. 101 below, for a further explanation. As developed with the imagery of the hand, R. Berekhiah's comment on verse 9 makes it possible to construe verse 10 as referring to God's control over the enemy's action.

## Notes to Section Five

### Notes to Verse 1
### (pp. 87-97)

1. As pointed out by Buber, this analogy, with minor word changes, is presented anonymously in Pesikta de-Rav Kahane, piska 15:6.

2. Deut. 1:12, the prooftext for Moses, is also used as a prooftext at the end of proem 11, again the connection is the word eikhah. The difference in chapter one is that the meaning of Deut. 1:12 is changed. Moses is honoring Israel, not complaining about the burden of leading a difficult nation. In addition, the word alone, levadai used in Deut. 1:12 leads very nicely into the word solitary badad used in Lam. 1:1.

3. In the Buber edition; Soncino brings in R. Nehemiah and R. Yehuda later, in explaining badad.

4. As Buber points out, this is expanded in Pesikta de-Rav Kahane, piska 15:6. The shorter version in Eikhah Rabbah makes the theme appear more clearly. The version that appears in Soncino (p. 68) carries the pun further, explaining 'ayekah (where are you) as 'oy lekha (woe to you).

5. Again, see Pesikta de-Rav Kahane, piska 15:6 where this is presented by R. Yodah, and appears before the saying by R. Nehemiah.

6. This same aural play is also used in proem 6: yom tokhahah, the day of rebuke (Hos. 5:9).

7. In the Soncino version, the numbers are out of order, 1-20-10-5, instead of 1-10-20-5.

8. Soncino adds the 10 commandments, the numerical value of bdd (solitary). This flows nicely with the next portion in Soncino, but becomes muddled in viewing the overall material. The word 'solitary' employed in various explanations is not fully developed.

9. Lev. 13:46 works beautifully with Lam 1:1 - badad yeshev and yashva badad.

10. Lam. R. 1:22 and proem 19 are similar in their structure of "If you are worthy then... And if you are unworthy then..." being

carried out through similar wording. This method is employed to a certain extent in proem 11 as well. It is interesting to look at proem 19's use of the word sit: positively it means dwelling in Jerusalem, negatively it means mourning in exile (Ps. 137:1), making a wonderful transition from the proem to Lam. 1:1.

11. See the comment attributed to R. Sim'ay [Sima], Buber p. 42, and Soncino p. 67.

12. Buber points out that this analogy appears in Pesikta de-Rav Kahane, piska 15.3, with variations. The most interesting variation is the conclusion of the section with Lam 1:1 as opposed to Isa. 22:12. A second variation of note is the placement of Nah. 1:3 and Lam. 3:28 next to each other, highlighting the shared imagery.

13. Perhaps it is meant as a transition because the next section dealing with the alphabet is concerned with mourning.

14. The prooftext for this is Lev. 26:3, the first word of which starts with an alef, the third word starts with a tav. Or possibly, the meaning extends to include the next prooftext Lev. 26:13, the last word of which ends with a tav. Lev. 26:13 also recalls the exodus from Egypt, thereby alluding to a future redemption as well.

15. In Soncino, this section appears earlier, following the Isa. 22:12 passage.

16. Soncino has even less Jer. 10:2, 11, 16.

17. Depite this, I feel the section on God mourning, ending with Isa. 22:12 was brought in later, even though it may not have been composed later, since all the surrounding material contains some Aramaic and this doesn't.

18. Bear in mind the mention of God drying up the seas in the prooftexts given earlier Isa. 50:3, Nah. 1:3, as well as Gen. 15:5 - Abraham's decendants will be as numerous as the stars. In Soncino, this prooftext is missing. There is mention that the Jerusalemites were double the number of people who escaped Egypt. This is followed by the R. Eleazar anecdotes.

19. In Soncino this appears at the end of the section dealing with the portion "the city full of people." This makes the midrash flow better, allowing it to end with the usage Ps. 128:6

as words of consolation.

20. Notice that the text states yoshevet ke-'almanah tying this portion in with the portion just completed, yashvah badad.

21. The prooftext for this is Isa. 50:1, calling to mind the intensive use of Isa. 50:3 at the beginning of the chapter.

22. According to Buber, this portion appears only in the manuscript and not in the printed editions. It is missing in Soncino.

23. See Buber, notes 58 and 59, p. 46.

24. The order of the anecdotes in Soncino is very different. Using the numbering system presented in this section, the stories appear in Soncino in the following order: 1, 2, 5, 11, 9, 6, 7, 8; 10 -18 are in the same order though internally there are numerous differences.

25. Anecdote #15 involving R. Akiva brings to mind the first anecdote, in both cases a child gets the father's inheritance.

26. As with anecdote #1, the humor involves a meal.

27. See B.T. Erubin 53b where anecdote #18 follows a series of anecdotes on language use.

28. Shaye Cohen, Destruction, pp. 32-3 sees this section as playing a great role in consoling the people. While this is certainly true, I would go further and say that the anecdotes also provide a way to relax, as well as "get even." The use of the anecdotes is dealt with in a Section Two. See above, pp. 54-70.

29. This same technique of comparing the trials that precede redemption is used in section 1:22. Proem 11 uses every verse of Chapter One in the same manner that is employed here, though the proem is less successful.

30. Soncino places here a section on weeping, which is placed by Buber in 1:2. The Buber version reads much better.

## Notes to Verses 9 - 13

(pp. 98 - 111)

1. This is the first part of the text in the Soncino edition and is followed by Ex. 28:34. The Buber reading is better, with Ex. 28:34 providing a transition from the idea of sin in vs. 8 to the issue of priestly sin in vs. 9.

2. See verse 1, p. 41, "eikhah," Israel transgresses the commandment of circumcision. See also vs. 1, p. 42, "yashvah badad," the parable of the prince being finely clothed (klei milat) and the prooftext from Ezek. 16:10 on finely embroidered clothes, tying together the commandment of milah and clothing as is done in vs. 9 with the priestly clothing and circumcision.

3. At the risk of stretching a point, this loosely ties in to the imagery presented in verse 1. In verse 9 circumcision is the equivalent of the covenant. As in verse 1, the issue of infidelity/idolatry follows covenant. (Soncino translates the pun on Tofet as meaning seduction but gives no explanation for this translation.) If this verse is indeed similar in structure to verse 1, the third part of the midrash should deal with Israel's disgrace/exile.

4. The Hebrew literally reads "under Jerusalem." This works well with the image of things above and below dealt with in verse 13.

5. The Aramaic kumr'a is used by Buber. In his notes (#318, p. 72) Buber explains that he has restored this word rather than 'epikores which he believes was a change due to censorship.

6. This portion is in Hebrew and appears verbatim in the parable. Perhaps it is a later addition, dramatically embellishing what took place at Tofet and strengthening a relatively unclear parable.

7. See Buber, p. 73, note #326 and Soncino p. 111, text and note #3.

8. Deut. 28:59, Ecc. 1:9, and Isa. 29:14 where pl' appears three times.

9. Jer. 9:20 lehakhrit relates to karu in Ps. 119:85. Jer 9:20 uvakhurim relates to bakhurim in II Chron. 36:17. Lev. 22:28

and Esther 3:13 both make reference to "in one day." Lev. 17:13 and Ps. 79:3 both deal with blood.

10. Soncino, p. 113.

11. Notice the development of the image of God's right hand from Ex. 15:12 to Isa. 62:8.

12. Soncino omits this portion of verse 10 and attaches the Ammon/Moab explanation to the first part of the verse.

13. This is an idea similarly expressed in proem 9 where Ammon and Moab enter Jerusalem, not the sanctuary. In proem 9 these foes are among the son'im, here they are among the goyim.

14. There are two problems with this parable. The first is that it is unclear what exactly the slave is plundering. Soncino has it as being the Torah. The Buber edition says wife, but Buber (p. 74, note 335) writes that the reprinted edition says 'bill of sale.' If this is the case, one could sympathize with the slave's behavior, which would weaken the analogy to Ammon and Moab. The second problem in the parable is that the cause of the fire in the palace is unknown and is phrased passively "a lighted torch which fell within the king's palace" (Soncino, p.114). This too softens the portrait of the enemies.

15. Explicit reference to Ammon and Moab appears only in Deut. 23:4-5 in this part.

16. See Bereshit Rabbah, chapter 41 on Gen. 13:5.

17. In an anecdote on Lam. 1:5, Yohanan ben Zakkai decides it is time to leave Jerusalem when he sees the people boiling straw for food.

18. This criticism of the leaders is directly tied in to the midrash on verse 9.

19. To continue the analogy of food to Torah, both dates and figs could be representative of Torah and the righteous. For example, Ps. 92:13 "The righteous shall flourish like a palm (date) tree. In regards to figs, there is the mystical notion, acted out during the Tu BiShevat seder, in which the Torah is symbolized by a fig because it may be consumed completely. The question is: when did this analogy develop?

20. Soncino describes the women as being harlots. This strengthens the imagery of infidelity that appears in verse 9. It also ties in with the image of women used later on in Lam. 1:20. In that section, examples are given of improper behavior by women of leading Jerusalemite familes. The connection to section 1:20 is further enhanced by the image of materialism represented by the golden basket in this section.

21. In Soncino this comment appears in the context of the golden basket that is exchanged for food at the beginning of this verse. It works well there, but better at the end of the verse where the comment on gluttony serves to tie in all the sins that Israel leading to the destruction.

22. And idolatry represents infidelity, a theme seen in verses 1 and 9. See also note 20 above.

23. Soncino, p. 117 the statement is introduced by "We have learnt in the Mishnah." Buber quotes this in note 345 p. 75, but does not mention whether this comes from the Mishnah.

24. The message is clearer in Soncino, p. 118, where Deut. 24:21, "When a man marries a wife...if she does not please him...he writes her a bill of divorce," is offered as a prooftext. This prooftext would make the third instance of using Deut. 24 since its initial appearance as a prooftext in verse 9). In addition, another pun can be made on ʿolel as meaning offspring. The pun may be derived from the biblical text since ʿolel is used in that context. Using ʿolel to mean gleaning capitalizes on the imagery of the fate of children that has already appeared in verse 10 and will be drawn upon greatly in verse 16.

25. In Soncino, this comment is said by R. Aha, stating that God's anger lasted one day.

26. This same imagery appears again in verse 14. There is also an inkling of it in verse 9 "Tofet."

27. Ezek. 10:2 ties the midrash together in a number of ways: 1) the word tahat used for comparing above/below in verse 13; 2) the image of the coals, developed in a way that is reminiscent of God's anger in the preceding verse; 3) the man in Ezek. 10:2 is clotned in linen (lavush badim), raising the imagery of clothing from verses 1 and 9. (See above, p. 132, note 2.)

28. Soncino contains an expanded section bringing in numerous

examples of "he said" appearing twice. See also Lev. R. 26:8.

29. The three years ties in beautifully to the section on Jerusalem's judgment taking three years. As mentioned above, this comment on verse 12 appears in the Soncino but not in the Buber. In Lev. R. 26:8, Gabriel holds the coals for six years, not three.

Another image found in this section is that of the hand (Ezek. 10:8) "The form of a man's hand under their wings." The power of God's hand was discussed in verse 10. The image will be alluded to later in this section through Judges 14:9 through the action of scraping/gathering.

30. Both prooftexts use water imagery and bring to mind the prooftext of Isa. 50:3 (God dries the sea) used in verse 1.

31. Both examples use a scraping imagery. Judges 4:9 is brought in at the beginning of this section in Soncino; the placement is better in Buber, allowing for the image to develop: being ruled, then conquered, being "ploughed under," then gathered (by God ). Finally justice is carried out, though it is unclear if this is in regards to Israel or the foe.

32. The pun of yrd is thus related to justice, connecting this material directly to the midrash on the first part of the verse where God carries out justice.

33. Soncino uses a prooftext from Micah 5:4 to make the point clear: "There will be peace when the Assyrian shall come into your land."

34. See especially verse 13: responsibility, consolation, punishment. The latter half of this verse is very terse. The material after vayardenah could have been eliminated.

## Notes to Verses 21 - 22

(pp. 112 - 116)

1. The prooftext, Num. 20:29, is used to provide a pun. Not only did the people see that Aaron was dead; they feared because of this death.

2. Soncino lacks the pun on 'Atarim. Without this pun it is difficult to see why the explanation of Aaron's death is included here.

3. In Soncino, p. 145, and Buber's note 498, the capture of the inhabitants is mentioned solely in the explanation that the verse refers to the destruction. The parable appears after all this in Soncino.

4. Soncino replaces the explanation of "west." The Buber edition gives Amos 3:11 as a prooftext, Soncino gives Isa. 21:13. Certainly, Buber is more consistent. Isa. 21:13 mentions Arabia, perhaps a later addition done under Arab rule.

5. Israel's righteousness causing her demise is raised in verse 9, the funeral address, Soncino pp. 111-12. See especially verse 16, Buber p. 81 where Israel protests that she did praise God and for this she was punished. Verse 14 can be taken as an example for righteousness with 'ol representing the yoke of heaven.

6. This sentiment is expressed in various ways throughout Chapter One and in the proems as well. See for example, verse 10, in which Israel is judged more harshly than her foes.

7. See, for example, verses 1 and 2, and proem 19.

8. In both cases this is a puns: 'af meaning both "nose" and "although."

9. Buber and Soncino offer different prooftexts.

10. The transition from "fire" ('esh) to "there is" (yesh) is an aural wordplay.

11. Direct mention of the Ninth of Av appears in Chapter One only in an historical sense, this being the day that the Temple was

destroyed. In the proems it is mentioned as a holiday, as in proems 9, 17 and 18.

# PART THREE

# CONCLUSION

The major thrust of the research concerning Eikhah Rabbah has concentrated on the placement of this work within the existing midrashic spectrum. This includes dating the midrash, and analyzing the material so as to place it within a geographic and historical framework. This type of research also involves comparison with parallel texts.

Scholars such as Baer, Saldarini and Neusner - as noted in the Introduction - have all examined portions of Eikhah Rabbah by using parallel texts for the purpose of placing it within an historical context. Shaye Cohen has done this as well, but goes on to look at the literary aspect of the midrash, comparing its focus and message with the original Lamentations text.

This thesis has focused on a number of literary factors in the midrash. In so doing, the attempt has been made to expose more structural and thematic elements that may be used to analyze the work. The concentration on thematic factors needs to be examined cautiously since there is always the possibility of reading too much into the text. Still, the attempt here was to examine the midrash from a new viewpoint, so as not to support a preconceived notion. It is possible to draw a few tentative conclusions from the literary perspective employed.

Eikhah Rabbah contains a few major themes. Over and over, the point is made that Israel sinned and is paying the price through exile. Thematically, this is presented in a number of verses through the tripartite motif of covenant/idolatry/exile. The covenant is most often represented through biblical verses related to it, such as the citation of Deut. 1:12, "How can I

alone bear the trouble of you," at the very beginning of section 1:1. Emphasis upon the covenant may also be seen in the image of marriage, the faithful wife left a widow, as is also seen in 1:1. In the same manner, breaking the covenant, idolatry, is also represented through biblical verses. The most common image is that of the golden calf. This is used in the proems (12, 13) as well as in Chapter One (1:3, 22). Chapter One also describes Israel's unfaithfulness either by using the image of an adulteress, or a transgressing priest (1:9).

Themes related to this tripartite motif also include consolation and vengeance. Certainly, Israel must have something to look forward to after exile. The view of better days to come is presented through prophetic passages, as in section 1:22 with the words of Isaiah: "Comfort ye. comfort ye." It is also brought out at the end of the anecdotal portion of section 1:1, which enhances the image of the widow. Consolation may even be derived from puns, as is the case in section 1:19 which puns on the word tsiyyunim found in Jer. 31:20, "Set up markers."

The theme of vengeance presents a problem of historical context in Eikhah Rabbah. Against whom is revenge desired? The very tone of the anecdotes of section 1:1 constitute subliminal revenge taken against Athenians, Samaritans or some unnamed enemy. In the anecdotes of section 1:5, vengeance is evidenced against a foe represented by "Amgar," though it is unclear if this person is Roman, Christian or Moslem.

Eikhah Rabbah employs images common to other midrashim, such as the contrast of day and night (1:10), or the spiritually

cleansing power of water (1:16-17). Yet the first chapter also contains unique images. The dominant motif of the garment is such a case. From garments of exile (1:1) to clothes of priesthood (1:5) to dresses that are cleansed of sin (1:16), this image occurs too frequently to be coincidental.

There is a great deal of tension within the images of this midrash. For example, the image of redemptive waters also physically destroy by drowning what they are trying to save. The water imagery frequently occurs in proximity to the image of blood, or water flowing with blood (1:16). It is unclear whether there is a pessimistic message that is meant to be drawn from the tension within this image.

Tension in imagery also reveals a unique ambivalence about God. While God is the judge and executor of judgment, God is also the savior. In both these cases God is all powerful. This is the prevalent message of the midrash. Yet, there are a number of places where God is presented as weak or old. Interestingly, this image of God occurs in the proems (15) and in Chapter One, section 1:6.

The way persons are presented also leads to tension. In the anecdotal section of 1:1, Yoḥanan ben Zakkai is not the same flawless hero who appears in the anecdote of 1:5. In section 1:16 Miriam bat Tanḥum is present in two stories. While she fully repents when she washes her garment, she receives no reward through the loss of her seven sons. Hence, the midrash undermines its own message through this character.

Tension is played out through biblical verses as well.

In the anecdotal portion of section 1:1, the image of the star appears in a dream, representing a Jewish life being destroyed. This is brought in conjunction with a verse concerning the covenant, Gen. 15:5, "Look toward heaven and count the stars," which is used as the prooftext for this story. With the image of a Jew being killed represented by a star, the covenant of Gen. 15:5 is brought into question.

The various ways in which tension arises in Eikhah Rabbah suggest a number of questions. Is the tension original to the work, or was it added by a later hand (or hands)? Does the tension highlight a theme, or is the result of bringing in a new theme? Certainly tension appears thematically in the proems, showing the flow and editing of the material. For example, in proem 1, Israel follows the Torah, whereas in proem 2, Israel foresakes Torah. Throughout Chapter One, the sins of Israel are enumerated, yet in sections 1:9 and 1:13 the righteous Israel suffers.

It is possible that the thematic tension represents the adding of different layers of the midrash, though this is different from the layering most apparent in the anecdotes. The anecdotes of section 1:1 thematically and linguistically appear to be from different times. The anecdotes of 1:5 also have later themes imposed upon them through the "Amgar" sequence. Tension is also introduced by the eulogy in 1:9. This is a self-contained unit, possibly a later addition, and certainly raises a new theme of the suffering of the righteous.

One possible approach to the existence of tension in Eikhah

Rabbah would be to view the stylistic elements presented by the various sections. Overall, Eikhah Rabbah appears to be a work meant to be heard. It contains a tremendous number of puns and wordplays. Yet, the sections providing tension in the work contain few puns, though they do carry the imagery of the text. Perhaps this stylistic difference is part of, at the very least, a two stage redactional process. First, the midrash which was intended for oral transmission was gathered. Second, a variety of thematically related material, not necessarily from an oral medium, was added to the text.

Such a redactional process would also call into question the intended audience of this work. Was it sermonic? Some of the proems appears to be so. This is because of content, such as their reference to the Ninth of Av (proems 17 and 18), or due to the wordplays that work so well aurally (proem 19). Chapter One also contains much that could be conveyed orally. Sections 1:1 and 1:2, for example, build up themes, images and countless puns.

On the other hand, it should be noted that a number of the themes and images of the midrash are only alluded to. The audience would have had to have been extremely knowledgable of the prooftexts cited to draw the appropriate thematic connections.

Overall, the material has been shaped to varying degrees. A specific image, such as the garment, may be developed extensively in a number of unconnected sections. Yet, it is important to stress the repetition of themes and images. The proems are definitely shaped, as can be seen through the development of themes among small groups of proems. An overall theme build-up

in the proems is not evident at this point. There is, however, a carryover of themes and images between the proems and the first chapter of the midrash.

It is tempting to point to a development of themes in Chapter One: A) sections 1:1 and 1:2 introduce the theme of covenant/idolatry/exile, B) sections 1:21 and 1:22 provide hope and consolation. Yet the intervening sections, while repeating themes and images, do not show a clearcut development of these. It is even impossible to determine which themes and images came first and which are possible later additions.

Hence, a close structural and thematic examination of Eikhah Rabbah leaves the reader with numerous questions for future exploration. What are the original themes, images and proems of the midrash? The anecdotes need to be studied in greater detail; specifically, the development and purpose of each anecdotal section. Within these sections names of certain characters might provide some clues. Who was Abgar? When did the mother of the seven sons get her name? When does the martyrology develop? What role does humor play in the midrash? At what point does humor enter into the midrash on Lamentations?

Ultimately, it would be desirable to go beyond the exploration of how Eikhah Rabbah was used in the past. This midrash challenges us to see the many ways in which our ancestors dealt with historical catastrophe. Eikhah Rabbah dares us to be as faithful and creative in facing our recent history.

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