

איכה

The Sound Of Ultimate Suffering

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Dr. Rabbi Rachel Adler

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Thank you to my family and friends, too numerous to name here, for continuing to support me and cheer me on.

Papa Jack, you are my light. Even in death, you provide me comfort every day.

Nadine, life is better with you! Thank you for everything that you do. I am so grateful for having you beside me every step of the way, for always encouraging me, and for helping me to do the absolute best that I can. I am grateful for the joy and spirit that you bring into my life.

**Do you hear that Fezzik? That is the sound of ultimate suffering. My heart made that sound when the six fingered man killed my father. The Man in Black makes it now.” -
Inigo Montoya, from *The Princes Bride***

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Introduction

Have you ever heard the sound of ultimate suffering? Perhaps your heart has made that sound in a moment of sheer agony, fear or desperation? Maybe you have heard the sound burst from the throat of a loved one? Everyone at some point in his or her life will face tragedy or be in a crisis that may cause them to lament. Laments, described by Kathleen O'Connor as "ancient poetry of truth-telling,"¹ can help bring meaning to suffering and provides an outlet to voice the unspeakable.

There are many different and unique voices heard in *Eicha*, each presenting different theologies and ideas about God. Using what my teacher Dr. Rabbi Rachel Adler describes as "uncensored language," the book of Lamentations gives us moral imagination into the suffering of others. The sheer audacity and courage of the book, and the language and *chutzpah* of its narrators disrupts the order of things to force us to say something we might not be prepared to say. O'Connor adds, "The book is an artistic jewel, a theological enigma, and a courageous act of survival."² *Eicha* is able to embrace the sorrows of the world.

Emanating deep from within one's *nefesh* (soul), laments are wails of sadness that allow us to respond to the fact that everything at times may feel broken. A Bob Dylan song with the same title (*Everything is Broken*³; a contemporary lament?) could in fact be *Eicha*'s theme song:

*Broken bodies, broken bones
Broken voices on broken phones
Take a deep breath, feel like you're chokin'*

¹ Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Lamentations & The Tears of the World* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 5 - 6.

² O'Connor, *Lamentations & The Tears of the World*, 3.

³ Bob Dylan, *Everything is Broken* from *Oh Mercy* (Album), 1989.

Everything is broken.

Laments can help us cope and bring meaning to our lives during times of death, pain, illness, loss or distress. We live in a culture that has become benumbed and more desensitized to the suffering of people in our families, communities and throughout the world.⁴ People rarely lament anymore, particularly in public. When was the last time you saw someone in distress in the park or at a restaurant? And what happens if they are? Everybody draws back in case the person is a psycho, right?

We lose an essential part of who we are when we cannot mourn, grieve, or even be sad in front of other people. Being sad is a natural part of what it means to be alive and should not be hidden or diminished. To lament is to cry out from our greatest depths into the oneness and mystery of nature, time and space. When our lives are in chaos or disarray, when fear overtakes you, people want and need a place to vent their feelings and emotions. Many direct these toward God. Others simply shout out to the world, hoping in desperation to receive a satisfying response. Laments provide a method for releasing these emotions.

There are no words to describe pain because everyone's pain is experienced uniquely.⁵ Some have a high tolerance while others shudder at the thought of getting a splinter. Words, at best, can hint to what pain feels like, while the song, poetry and drama of lament literature speaks when all other forms of communication break down. Words create metaphors for our pain. Metaphor allows us to infer someone else's pain by

⁴ O'Connor, *Lamentations & The Tears of the World*, 4.

⁵ Elaine Scarry, *The Body In Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1985) 3.

guessing what they might be going through. “It feels like a knife is digging into my back.” “This rash burns like a raging fire.” When you are in real agony there is nothing but the pain. The last thing most people are able to do when they are in severe pain is talk, rather they moan, grunt, gasp, yell, gurgle, cry, or scream.

Lament, therefore, is on the edge of language, characterized by utterances such as “oy,” and “vai.” All languages and cultures have these sounds having to do with pain that allow people to express their emotions, not only with words, but also through screams, screeches and spasms. Dr. Adler suggests, “The open vowel of the emphatic *ah* (in *Eicha*), mimics a scream: *Eichaaah!* For when people are truly horror stricken, what astonishes them is how an ordinary day turned into a catastrophe after which nothing will ever be the same.”⁶

One of the five *Megillot* in the Hebrew Bible *Eicha* is a theological and prophetic response to the destruction of the Temple. A collection of poetic laments, it attempts to address this momentous event in Jewish history that would become a turning point in Jewish religious development.⁷

The world depicted in the book of Lamentations has been turned upside down and it's words captures a communal cry for help and plea for comfort. When these howls go unanswered the people of Jerusalem find themselves in crisis. Adele Berlin, world renowned biblical scholar observes, “The world order of Lamentations has been disrupted; no order exists any longer in the real world.”⁸ After its destruction, Jerusalem

⁶ Rachel Adler, *For These I Weep: A Theology of Lament*, CCAR Journal LXI/IV (Fall, 2014) 86.

⁷ Adele Berlin, *Lamentations* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 1.

⁸ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 5.

becomes the ultimate *bizarro* city: once great and full of people, it now lies desolate and utterly ruined, the people starve, the men humiliated and emasculated and women are forced to eat their babies to survive. Abandoned by *Adonai* and overrun by enemies, the people of Jerusalem are in serious need of comfort but do not receive any.

Cities, described with feminine language, have typically been understood as a place of maternal comfort. The city, especially Jerusalem, was for its inhabitants a place of power and protection, sustaining its people as a mother would her child. Embraced by its surrounding wall, the maternal city was trusted as a place of strength, political will and influence. The first image we read in the book, however, is Jerusalem as a widow and a slave, a marginal woman, rather than a great lady. (1:1). From the outset we know things are not as they are supposed to be.

Full of extraordinary poetry, prose and music, chapters 1, 2, and 4 are an alphabetical acrostic, with each line starting with another letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 3 is a three-fold acrostic, with three lines for each letter of the alphabet. Berlin notes that acrostics, common in the Bible, are a way to express completeness (everything from A to Z), especially if it could never all really be expressed, as in the themes of our book. Chapter five is not an acrostic, however has exactly twenty-two lines and thus conforms to the alphabet (the Hebrew alphabet has twenty-two letters) to a lesser degree.

The book of Lamentations masterfully and uniquely employs a mix of genres and forms including dirge literature, religious poetry, acrostics, personal and communal

lament. A true and unique literary creation⁹ P. W. Ferris, Jr. and H. Gunkel describe the book in this way:

The book is a masterful combining of related literary material. When one considers that this book meshes *qinah* meter and overall structure, combines individual and community lament, combines the basic syntax of narrative and poetry, uses the structure of acrostic without making all the acrostics the same, and provides thematic continuity from first poem to last, then one has to be impressed with the books artistry even if one cannot put a specific name to the books genre.¹⁰

Eicha's Hebrew name and three of its five chapter's first word is *Eicha*, translated as: how, alas, woe, or *vai*! "*Eich*" is a question of utter desperation, a plea for an answer. Two common questions when people suffer are "why me" and "how did this happen?" At its core *Eichah* is about pain and suffering and the failure of language to capture the loss, hurt and emotions that come along with those feelings.

This book deals primarily with the destruction of the Holy Temple, the city Jerusalem and the conquest of Israel. Consequently *Eichah* also describes vividly what it means to lose your home. Astonishingly, the book models, not passivity and mute submission, but questioning and rage towards God. This questioning creates a redistribution of power between people and God.¹¹ The people, outraged ask, "How could you use your limitless power so brutally?" This permission to question God at times of crisis can be empowering. When language and the universe become unmade by

⁹ Duane Garrett and Paul R. House, *Word Biblical Commentary: Song of Songs/Lamentations* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 316.

¹⁰ Garrett and House, *Word Biblical commentary: Song of Songs/Lamentations*, 316.

¹¹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Costly Loss of Lament* (Missouri, Eden Theological Seminary), 59.

pain¹², when it feels like your life is in chaos, laments can give expression to the inexpressible.

Eichah speaks to our greatest pain and losses. Among many of the themes in the book are the destruction of homeland, the loss of love, hope, comfort, peace and all things good, and the emergence of evil, hatred, pain and suffering. The destruction of Jerusalem, after all, is the event in which the long narrative from Genesis through Kings culminates, about which the prophets warned, and which leaves its mark on all subsequent literature in the Bible.

The events in the book of Lamentations are about a specific time and event; it does not dwell either on the future or the past, but rather on the moment itself. Our gaze, locked on the horrible moment of destruction, is compelled by the pain and terror of the events. We are forced to remain “in the moment.” Berlin notes:

We do not always know when the poet of Lamentations was speaking of past suffering or of suffering yet to come. In many instances, both past and future signify the ongoing present. The suffering in Lamentations is timeless, and the expression of this timelessness seems to have been one of the poet’s goals.¹³

The same sentiment is true with pain and suffering, both of which compel us to stay present, locked in our body, sometimes without the words to describe how we feel. We lose all sense of time passing. It feels as if we will always hurt the way we hurt right now.

¹² Scarry, *The Body In Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, 4.

¹³ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 3.

Full of violent images and vicious acts of terror, “the reader is not so much engaged by the book of Lamentations as assaulted by it,” remarks Tod Linafelt.¹⁴ Linafelt declares, “A more relentlessly brutal piece of writing is scarcely imaginable.”¹⁵ And yet, this book is one of the most human in our tradition, because, as Theodor Adorno, German sociologist, philosopher and musicologist maintains, “The need to let suffering speak is the condition of all truth.”¹⁶ If anything, *Eichah* undoubtedly lets suffering speak.

In this paper I will look closely at the Hebrew text from *Eichah* to examine how this book can help and encourage us to deal with pain, suffering and loss. Hopefully along the way I will gain a better understanding of how to use *Eichah* to both comfort and enrich peoples lives during times of chaos. Ultimately, I hope people will learn to embrace and appreciate lament literature.

¹⁴ Tod Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, And Protest In The Afterlife Of A Biblical Book*, (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 2.

¹⁵ Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, And Protest In The Afterlife Of A Biblical Book*, 2.

¹⁶ Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, And Protest In The Afterlife Of A Biblical Book*, 1.

Part One

Lamentations - A Translation
By Zachary Ira Zysman

איכה

The Sound of Ultimate Suffering

Chapter One

(1) אֵיכָה יִשְׁבָּה בְּדָד הָעִיר רַבְתִּי עַם הָיְתָה כְּאַלְמָנָה רַבְתִּי בְּגוֹיִם שָׂרְתִי
בְּמַדִּינוֹת הָיְתָה לְמֶסֶס:

- 1) ***“How!?”¹⁷ She sits¹⁸ alone,¹⁹ the great city that once was many with people²⁰. She has become like a mute, worthless!²¹ She, a noble lady²² among the nations, a princess²³ among the provinces²⁴, has become a forced laborer!²⁵***

¹⁷ אֵיכָה - The Brown Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (BDB) defines אֵיכָה as “exclam. How! (slightly more emph. than אֵיךְ). Marcus Jastrow offers “oh how! oh!” F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers, 1906); in subsequent citations this book will be referred to as BDB. Dr. Rachel Adler writes, “The books Hebrew name is *Eichah*, and three of its five chapters begin with that word. *Eichah* (How!) is used in the Book of Lamentations, not as a call for reasoned explanations of cause and effect, not as the rational inquiry, *eich?* but as an exclamation of incredulous horror. “how dreadfully everything has changed!” “How awful this is!” The open vowel of the emphatic *ah*, mimics a scream: *Eichaaah*. For when people are truly horror stricken, what astonishes them is how an ordinary day turned into a catastrophe after which nothing will ever be the same.” In conversations with Dr. Adler definitions for *Eichah* such as “oy, vai, and uch!” have also been suggested.

¹⁸ יִשְׁבָּה - Duane Garrett and Paul R. House, in 23B Word Biblical Commentary of Lamentations define יִשְׁבָּה as “sits, dwells. A pf. is used to describe a present condition that is quite fixed in nature.”

¹⁹ בְּדָד - BDB offers “isolation, separation: fig. of freedom from attack, more usually as adv. accus., to signify alone.” M. Jastrow says, “lonely, forsaken. Part. pass. בְּדוּד exiled.”

²⁰ רַבְתִּי - Adele Berlin notes “the word רַבְתִּי occurs twice in this verse, but unlike most exegetes I have construed it differently in each case because the grammatical construction is different. Here, עַם רַבְתִּי is a construct chain, meaning ‘having much/many people,’ hence “full, thronged.”

²¹ כְּאַלְמָנָה - A Reader’s Hebrew Bible defines אֶלְמָנָה “widow.” BDB offers “Fig. of Jerusalem, esp. widow as helpless, exposed to oppression and harsh treatment.” אֵלֶם = dumb, unable to speak.”

²² רַבְתִּי - Berlin asserts “in this phrase בְּגוֹיִם רַבְתִּי, *rabbatai* is an independent noun followed by a preposition. The term *rab* is a title, ‘chief,’ a feminine equivalent of *rab*.”

²³ שָׂרְתִי - M. Jastrow says “princess, v. שָׂרָה. BDB says “princess, noble lady; - cstr. שָׂרְתִי.”

²⁴ בְּמַדִּינוֹת - BDB: 2. of the Babylonian empire; *princess among the provinces*.

²⁵ לְמֶסֶס - BDB - “b. of conquered populations, subject to forced labour.” Jastrow - impost, tribute, tax; the places which were made tributary (under Joshua) are considered as conquered.”

(2) בָּכוּ תִבְכֶּה בַּלַּיְלָה וְדִמְעָתָה עַל לִחְיָהּ אֵין-לָהּ מְנַחֵם מִכָּל-אֲהָבֶיהָ כָּל-רֵעֶיהָ בָּגְדוּ בָּהּ הָיוּ לָהּ לְאֻיְבִים:

- 2) *She weeps bitterly²⁶ at night and sheds tears²⁷ on her cheek.²⁸ No one comforts her²⁹ from all of those that love her.³⁰ All of her friends³¹ rebel against her³², they have become her enemies³³.*

²⁶ תבכה - BDB - infinite absolute conveys emphasis. of an idea (Gesenius) 1. *weep* (in grief, humiliation, or joy); 2. *weep bitterly, weep intensely, grievously*.

²⁷ דמעתי - BDB - *tears*; M. Jastrow says, “דמע - to flow, shed tears.”

²⁸ לחיה - BDB - jaw, cheek.

²⁹ מנחם - BDB - “Piel, *Pt.* - *comfort, console, abs.*

³⁰ אהביה - Rashi says, “those who love her.” BDB - 4. esp. *Pt.* אהב = (a) *lover*, (fig. of Jerus.).

³¹ רע - BDB - *friend, companion, fellow, intimate*.

³² בגדו - Jastrow - from בגד (b.h.; v. infra) *to act violently, to rebel, be faithless*. Also בגדו his garment; “from Targ. renderings as well as from Agadic interpretations it appears that the primitive meaning off בגד is *to tear*; also *to despise*.”

³³ אויבים - BDB from איב *to be hostile to, treat as enemy*. Jastrow offers “*enmity, hostility, grudge*. An enemy is he who has not spoken to his neighbor for three days in his grudge...for the sake of preventing ill-feeling.

(3) גִּלְתָּהּ יְהוּדָה יַעֲנִי וּמֵרֵב עֲבָדָהּ הִיא יֹשְׁבָהּ בַּגּוֹיִם לֹא מִצָּאָה מְנוּחַ כָּל רֹדְפֶיהָ הַשִּׁיגוּהָ בֵּין הַמִּצָּרִים:

- 3) *Judah has become bare of its inhabitants³⁴ after³⁵ much misery³⁶ and excessive³⁷ servitude³⁸; she dwells³⁹ among the nations⁴⁰ finding⁴¹ no reprieve⁴²; all of her pursuers⁴³ trapped her⁴⁴ between narrow places⁴⁵.*

³⁴ גלטה - BDB (גלה) - *to be uncovered. to leave home, go into exile. (of a place) to become bare of inhabitants.*

³⁵ מן - The Anchor Bible notes, "Though some versions and commentators have taken *min*, "from," here as casual, "on account of" this is very strained in the present case, and involves the necessity of taking *galah* in a sense, "to migrate (voluntarily)," which it does not really have...Hence the preposition must be taken as "out of." The idea is that the actual catastrophe came after a long period of inglorious trouble and toil. Moreover...the remainder of the verse also refers to Judah's troubles *before* the captivity.

³⁶ עני - *misery, poverty, privation* (Jastrow).

³⁷ מרב - BDB - *multitude, abundance, greatness; from a multitude of.*

³⁸ עבדה - *labor, service* (BDB); *work, labor, service, attendance* (Jastrow).

³⁹ יושבה - see comment #2.

⁴⁰ בגוים - *crowd, people, nation; gentiles, idolator* (Jastrow) *community* (BDB).

⁴¹ מצא - *to reach, to find* (Jastrow).

⁴² מנוח - *rest, find rest* (Jastrow).

⁴³ רדפיה - *pursue; figure of punishment, judgement* (BDB).

⁴⁴ השיגוה - *reach, overtake (figure of battle)* (BDB).

⁴⁵ המצרים - *narrow, alludes to Egypt; boundary, lines* (Jastrow).

(4) דְּרָכֵי צִיּוֹן אֲבֵלוֹת מִבְּלִי בָּאִי מוֹעֵד כָּל שְׁעָרֶיהָ שׁוֹמְמִין כִּהְנִיחָהּ נֶאֱנָחִים בְּתוֹלְתֶיהָ נוֹגוֹת וְהָיָא מֵר לָהּ:

- 4) *The Roads to Zion⁴⁶ are in mourning⁴⁷, without⁴⁸ (anyone to) come during festival feasts⁴⁹. All of her gates⁵⁰ are desolate⁵¹. Her priests sigh⁵² and her virgins⁵³ are raped⁵⁴. There is bitterness⁵⁵ for her.*

(5) הָיוּ צָרֶיהָ לְרֹאשׁ אִיבָיָהּ שָׁלוּ כִּי־יָהוָה הוֹגָה עַל רַב־פְּשָׁעֶיהָ עוֹלָלָיָהּ הִלְכוּ שְׁבִי לִפְנֵי־צָר:

- 5) *Her adversaries⁵⁶ are now in charge⁵⁷. Those that are hostile to her⁵⁸ prosper⁵⁹, for Adonai raped/afflicted⁶⁰ her on account of her many transgressions⁶¹. Her babies⁶² have gone into captivity⁶³ before her enemies⁶⁴.*

⁴⁶ "roads to Zion" (Hillers).

⁴⁷ אבילות - (pred., inanim. subj.) elsewhere as subst. *mourner*; for dead...where mourners for Zion (BDB).

⁴⁸ בלי - "In Job מבלי is used more freely = *without*, the connexion with a preceding verb being no longer distinctly felt" (BDB).

⁴⁹ באי מועד - בוא - *those coming to an appointed feast; come in, come, go in, go* (BDB).

⁵⁰ All her gates (Jerusalem).

⁵¹ שמים - pl. 1. *be desolated*, 2. *be appalled, awestruck* (BDB).

⁵² אנה - **vb.** only **Niph.** *sigh, groan, mostly poet and late* (BDB).

⁵³ בתולה - **n.f.** *virgin* (BDB).

⁵⁴ יגה - **Niph.** *pt. fpl. suffer; grieved*, of exiles, virgins of Zion, cause grief or sorrow (BDB) Berlin follows Hillers, Proven, and many recent translations (so also Rashi) in taking נוגות as the niph'al participle of יגה although they define נוגות as grieving/mourning, I choose the stronger "rape" because I feel that is more reflective of what happened in the verse.

⁵⁵ מר - **adj.** and **subst.** *bitter, bitterness* (BDB).

⁵⁶ צר - **n.m.** *adversary; foe*.

⁵⁷ ראש - *head = division of army, company, band* (BDB).

⁵⁸ איב - **vb.** *be hostile to* (BDB).

⁵⁹ שלו - *be at ease, prosper*, of wicked (BDB).

⁶⁰ יגה - *Impf.* 2 mpl. *suffer, grieve* (BDB).

⁶¹ פשע - **n.m.** *transgression against God; punishing in various ways* (BDB).

⁶² עולל - **n.m.** *child taken captive* (BDB).

⁶³ שבי - **n.m.** *captivity, captives* (BDB).

⁶⁴ צר - **n.m.** *adversary, foe* (BDB).

(6) וַיֵּצֵא מִן־בֵּת־צִיּוֹן כָּל־הַדָּרָה הָיָה שָׁרֶיהָ כְּאַיִלִים לֹא־מֵצְאוּ מְרֻעָה וַיִּלְכוּ בְּלֹא־כֹחַ לִפְנֵי רוֹדְדֶיהָ:

6) *Gone⁶⁵ from the Daughters of Zion⁶⁶ is all her majesty⁶⁷; her princes⁶⁸ are like stags⁶⁹ who can find no green pastures⁷⁰; they totter strength before their pursuers⁷¹.*

(7) זָכְרָה יְרוּשָׁלַם יְמֵי עָנִיָּהּ וּמְרוֹדֶיהָ כָּל־מִחְמַדֶּיהָ אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ מִיָּמֵי קֹדֶם בְּנִפְלַע עֲמָהּ בְּיַד־צָר וַאֲיִן עוֹזֵר לָהּ רְאוּהָ צָרִים שָׂחֲקוּ עַל מִשְׁבֶּתָהּ:

7) *Jerusalem remembers⁷² all that was desirable⁷³ to her from the days of old during her miseries⁷⁴ and days of affliction⁷⁵; when her people fell⁷⁶ by the hand of her enemy⁷⁷. There was no help, her enemies saw and mocked⁷⁸ over their annihilation⁷⁹.*

⁶⁵ יֵצֵא - *exit, end* (BDB) go out (*Old Testament Parsing Guide*); Garrett and House explain: וַיֵּצֵא, “has gone out,” is act. (qal imp. 3 m. sg., יֵצֵא).

⁶⁶ Garrett and House: “from daughter Zion.” A few versions of the Qere eliminate the ו and read מִבֵּית. No change in meaning results.

⁶⁷ הִדָּר - adornment, splendor; majesty (*A Reader's Hebrew Bible*), 1421.

⁶⁸ שָׂרֵי - **n.m.** chieftain, chief, ruler, official, captain, prince (BDB).

⁶⁹ אֵיל - fallow deer; hart, stag (*A Reader's Hebrew Bible*); as in search of pasture, sim. of princes of Judah; as longing for water, sim. of longing for Adonai (BDB).

⁷⁰ מְרֻעָה - **n.m.** pasturage, pasture; pasture, of wild ass (BDB).

⁷¹ רֹדְדִים - **vb.** pursue, chase, persecute (BDB); they are weak from starvation (Dr. Adler).

⁷² זָכַר - **vb.** remember past experiences; things formerly known...with implied regret, longing (BDB).

⁷³ מִחְמָד - **n.m.** desire, desirable thing; precious things (BDB); Berlin adds: “her treasures.” It is generally rendered “pleasures” in our verse - that is, happy times or experiences. Indeed, its sense is things that delight her, treasured moments or treasured memories.

⁷⁴ Berlin says, “To be consistent with the rest of the context, v. 7 must refer to Jerusalem remembering the time of the siege and destruction. The problem is that the Hebrew text lacks the particle “in” before “the days,” although it is supplied in many translations. If “in” is not supplied, the verse seems to mean that Jerusalem remembers the days of her misery. That in turn makes “all her treasures of earlier days” seem out of place and unintelligible. Some commentators therefore omit this phrase altogether. ומְרוֹדֶיהָ, “her trouble,” is a rare word (cf. Lam 3:19 and Isa 58:7, where it also occurs in collocation with “misery”).

⁷⁵ See footnote #21.

⁷⁶ נָפַל - 4a. *Fall upon; fall into the hand* (power) (BDB).

⁷⁷ See Footnote #49.

⁷⁸ שָׂחַק - *Impf.* 3 ms. **1a.** *laugh at*, usu. in contempt, derision (BDB).

⁷⁹ מִשְׁבֶּת - **n. [m.]** cessation, annihilation (BDB).

8) חָטְאָה חָטְאָה יְרוּשָׁלַם עַל־כֵּן לְנִידָה הָיְתָה כָּל־מִכְבְּדֶיהָ הִזְלִיחָה כִּי־רָאוּ עֲרוֹתֶיהָ גַם־הִיא נִאֲנָחָה וַתִּשָּׁב אֲחֹרֶר:

8) *Jerusalem sinned egregiously⁸⁰, therefore she was shunned like a menstruant⁸¹, for all who once honored her⁸² now despise her⁸³ (and treat her as worthless); for they have seen her genitals⁸⁴. And moreover, she sighs⁸⁵ and turns⁸⁶ away⁸⁷.*

9) טִמְאַתָּה בְּשׁוּלֶיךָ לֹא זָכְרָה אַחֲרִיתָהּ וַתִּרְדַּךְ פְּלָאִים אֵין מְנַחֵם לָהּ רְאֵה יְהוָה אֶת־עֲנִי כִּי הִגְדִּיל אוֹיֵב:

9) *Her uncleanness⁸⁸ stains her skirt⁸⁹. She has no regard for her backside⁹⁰ and she has hit rock bottom⁹¹. No one comforts her. “Take a good look, Adonai⁹², at my affliction! For my enemy jeers and is making a spectacle⁹³!”*

⁸⁰ Garret and House note “sinned greatly.” This emends חָטְאָה to חָטְאָה to make the first word and inf. abs. Even if MT vowels are retained, the sense of the verse is not altered, for the twofold use of forms of “sin” emphasizes Jerusalem’s wickedness.

⁸¹ Definition derives from conversations with Dr. Adler. נִידָה - **n.f.** impurity, abhorrent, shunned; esp. of menstruation (BDB). Adele Berlin adds: The word נִידָה, here translated as “banished,” has provoked extensive comment because of its anomalous form. Three lines of interpretation can be found from medieval to modern times, all grammatically possible but equally difficult, and all supported by the immediate context”...1) to move or shake (the head), 2) wanderer and 3) a menstruant. “It may be best to conclude that all three associations adhere to the word, and the dominant one shifts as we proceed from line to line - from the consequence of sin, to the scorn of others, to the idea of nakedness and impurity in her skirts. (Berlin).

⁸² כָּבַד - **3.** *be honored, make honorable, honor, glorify* (BDB).

⁸³ זָלַל - **Hiph. pf. sf. causat. of Qal 1** *make light of, despise* (BDB).

⁸⁴ עָרֹה - **n.f.** nakedness, pudenda; implying shameful exposure; mostly of women: fig. of Jerusalem (BDB).

⁸⁵ אָנַח - **vb.** only **Niph.** *sigh, groan*, mostly poet. and late; **1.** *sigh*, in token of grief of Jerusalem (BDB).

⁸⁶ שׁוּב - **vb.** *turn back, return* (BDB).

⁸⁷ אָחֹרֶר - **vb.** *to remain behind, delay, tarry* (BDB).

⁸⁸ טִמְאַה - **n.f.** *uncleanness* (BDB).

⁸⁹ שׁוּל - **n.m.** *skirt, of robe; skirts* (BDB).

⁹⁰ אַחֲרִית - *no regard for future, not thinking about consequences* (conversation with Dr. Adler); *after-part, end* (BDB).

⁹¹ פְּלָאִים - “amazingly, or extraordinarily.” This m. pl. noun is a pl. of amplification or intensification. (Garrett and House); **n.m.** *wonder, as unusual, extraordinary* (BDB).

⁹² From a conversation with Dr. Adler.

⁹³ The expression הִגְדִּיל אוֹיֵב means the enemy boasts about its superiority (Berlin).

10) יָדוּ פָּרֶשׁ צָר עַל כָּל־מַחְמָדֶיהָ כִּי־רָאָתָה גּוֹיִם בָּאוּ מִקְדָּשָׁהּ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָה לֹא־יָבֹאוּ בְּקִהְלָהּ לָךְ:

10) *The enemy stretches⁹⁴ his hand over all her precious things⁹⁵. She has seen nations enter her sanctuary, whom you commanded, “They shall not enter into your community!”*

11) כָּל־עַמָּה נֹאנָחִים מִבְּקָשִׁים לָהֶם נָתְנוּ מִחֲמוּדֶיהֶם בְּאֶכָּל לְהָשִׁיב נַפְשׁ רֹאֵה יְהוָה וְהִבִּיטָה כִּי הָיִיתִי זוֹלָלָה:

11) *All her people are groaning, searching for food; They gave their valuables for food to eat to keep themselves alive. “Take a good look, Adonai! And see, for I have become despised⁹⁶!*

12) לֹא אֲלִיכֶם כָּל־עֲבָרֵי דֶרֶךְ הַבֵּיטוּ וּרְאוּ אִם־יֵשׁ מִכְאוּב פֶּמְכָאֻבִּי אֲשֶׁר עוֹלֵל לִי אֲשֶׁר הוּגָה יְהוָה בְּיוֹם חֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ:

12) *Let it not happen to you⁹⁷, all you passersby on the road! Look and see, “Is there any pain⁹⁸ like MY pain, which Adonai has severely dealt⁹⁹ to me, inflicted¹⁰⁰ on the day of his flaming¹⁰¹ anger?”*

⁹⁴ פָּרֶשׁ - **vb.** spread out, spread (BDB).

⁹⁵ See footnote #58.

⁹⁶ זולל - The word זולל is usually taken from the root זול, with the sense of “lacking value”...tramp, vagabond, beggar.” (Berlin); **vb.** be worthless, insignificant (BDB).

⁹⁷ “This phrase is extremely difficult to translate into idiomatic English.” Some translate the phrase into a question. Others simply translates the words literally. (Garrett and House).

⁹⁸ כאב - **n.m.** pain; of mental pain, of troubles of wicked, as result of sin; partic. of suffering servant (BDB).

⁹⁹ עלל - **vb. Po’el**, act severely, “my pain which is severely dealt out to me.” (BDB).

¹⁰⁰ יגה - **Hiph.** pf. 3 ms. suffer, cause grief or sorrow (BDB).

¹⁰¹ חרון - **n.m.** (burning of) anger; of God’s anger; burst of burning anger (BDB).

13) מִמָּרוֹם שָׁלַח־אֵשׁ בְּעֶצְמֹתַי וַיִּרְדְּנָה פָּרֶשׁ רֶשֶׁת לְרַגְלִי הָשִׁיבֵנִי אַחֲוֹר נִתְּנֵנִי שְׁמִמָּה כָּל־הַיּוֹם דָּוָה:

13) *From on high¹⁰² He sent fire into my bones and trampled them¹⁰³. He stretched a net¹⁰⁴ for my feet, he held me back. He made me desolate¹⁰⁵; all day long I was faint¹⁰⁶.*

14) נִשְׁקָד עַל פִּנְשָׁי בְּיָדוֹ יִשְׁתַּרְגּוּ עָלַי עַל־צִוְאָרֵי הַכְּשִׁיל כַּחֲזִי נִתְּנֵנִי אֲדֹנָי בְּיָדִי לֹא־אוּכָל קוֹם:

14) *My sins¹⁰⁷ were bound¹⁰⁸ (as a) yoke¹⁰⁹ (on my neck), knit together¹¹⁰ by his hand on my neck¹¹¹, it sapped¹¹² my strength. Adonai has given me into the hands of those who are not able to hold me up.*

¹⁰² מרום - **n.m.** height; from the sky, from heaven (BDB).

¹⁰³ וירדנה, “and it trampled them.” MT presents this form as a al impf. 3m sg. from רדה. LXX and Syr. “have interpreted the Hebrew verb as a Hiphil from the root ירד (‘descend’). (Garrett and House).

¹⁰⁴ רשת/ירש - **n.f.** net; by wicked (= plot) (BDB).

¹⁰⁵ See #36.

¹⁰⁶ דוה - **adj.** faint, unwell (BDB).

¹⁰⁷ see #46 (פשע).

¹⁰⁸ The word נשקד occurs nowhere else in the Bible and has been the subject of much conjecture. A common variant is “to keep watch,” which occurs in some Hebrew manuscripts and was the basis of some ancient translations.

¹⁰⁹ על - **n.m.** yoke (BDB).

¹¹⁰ שרג - **Hithp. Impf.** 3 mpl. *they intertwine themselves*; be intertwined (BDB).

¹¹¹ צואר - **n.m.** neck, back of neck; esp. back of neck, of man, wearing chain as ornament (BDB).

¹¹² כשל - **Hiph. Pf.** 2. make feeble, weak (of God’s dealing with Jerusalem) (BDB).

15) סֵלָה כָּל־אֲבִירֵי אֲדֹנָי בְּקֶרְבִּי קָרָא עָלַי מוֹעֵד לְשֹׁפֵר בַּחֲוֹרֵי גֵת דָּרָךְ אֲדֹנָי לְבַת־יְהוּדָה:

15) *He trampled and rejected¹¹³ all of my warriors/heroes¹¹⁴, Adonai in my midst! He proclaimed a holiday of extreme violence¹¹⁵ to crush¹¹⁶ my babies¹¹⁷. Adonai has trodden¹¹⁸ as in the winepress¹¹⁹ the virgin daughter of Judah!*

16) עַל־אֵלֶּה אֲנִי בּוֹכֶיָה עֵינֵי יְרֵדָה מַיִם כִּי־רָחַק מִמֶּנִּי מְנַחֵם מְשִׁיב נֶפְשֵׁי הָיוּ בְנֵי שְׁוִמִּים כִּי גִבֹּר אֲנִי:

16) *For these things¹²⁰ I weep¹²¹, my eyes, my eyes¹²² flow with tears. For far from me is any comfort, no one to keep me alive. My children are desolate, for the enemy has overpowered us, emasculated us and prevailed¹²³.*

17) פָּרָשָׁה צִיּוֹן בִּיָּדֶיהָ אֵין מְנַחֵם לָהּ צָוָה יְהוָה לִיַּעֲקֹב סָבִיבֵיו צָרִיו הָיְתָה יְרוּשָׁלַם לְנֶדָה בִּינֵיהֶם:

17) *Zion stretches out her hands, no one comforts her. Adonai has commanded against Jacob¹²⁴ that those that surround him are his enemies. Jerusalem has become a menstruating woman among them.*

¹¹³ סֵלָה - "he has scorned." This form (pi'el pf. 3m. sg.) only appears here in MT. Hiller suggests that a scribe has confused סֵלָה and סָלַל, "he has heaped up." He argues that this reading connects with the harvest imagery in 1:15c. The versions vary widely, which probably indicates their efforts to translate a rare verb whose root can carry various meanings. (Garret and House)

¹¹⁴ אֲבִיר - **adj.** strong, mighty, valiant (BDB).

¹¹⁵ From a conversation with Dr. Adler.

¹¹⁶ שֹׁפֵר - **vb.** break, break in pieces; break in, down, rend violently; break pride; crush (BDB).

¹¹⁷ בָּחֹר - **n.m.** young man (BDB); babies = from conversations with Dr. Adler.

¹¹⁸ דָּרָךְ - **vb.** tread, march; tread them down.

¹¹⁹ גֵת - wine-press.

¹²⁰ עַל אֵלֶּה - "on account of these things" (BDB).

¹²¹ see #10.

¹²² עֵינֵי עֵינֵי - "my eyes, my eyes." According to Gottlieb, five Heb. MSS, LXX, Syr., and Vg. translate only one of the words. Most modern translations follow their lead. Still, Gottlieb also notes "it is a by no means rare phenomenon for a word to be repeated in a Semitic text, so that it should thereby be given greater emphasis." (Garrett and House)

¹²³ גִבֹּר - 2. prevail, e.g. enemies; related גָבַר; male (BDB).

¹²⁴ "The phrase is difficult. Cross, "Studies," prefers the reading in 4QLam, with the meaning, "The Lord kept watch on Jacob: his enemies have surrounded him." But this reading is at best a marginal improvement. (Berlin)

18) צָדִיק הוּא יְהוָה כִּי פִיהוּ מְרִיתִי שְׁמָעוּ-נָא כָּל-עַמִּים וּרְאוּ מִכְאֲבִי בְּתוֹלְתִי וּבַחֲוָרֵי הֶלְכוּ בְּשִׁבִּי:

18) *Adonai is righteous¹²⁵ for I have rebelled¹²⁶ against his word¹²⁷, please hear, listen, everyone! And look at my pain. My virgins and babies have gone into captivity.*

19) קָרָאתִי לְמֵאֲהָבֵי הֵמָּה רְמוּנֵי כְּהֲנֵי וַזְּקֵנֵי בָּעִיר גָּוְעוּ כִּי-בִקְשׁוּ אֶכֶל לָמוֹ וַיִּשְׁיבוּ אֶת-נַפְשָׁם:

19) *I called to my lovers but they deceived me¹²⁸. My priests and elders died¹²⁹ in the city as they searched for food in order to keep themselves alive.*

20) רְאֵה יְהוָה כִּי-צָר-לִי מֵעֵי חֲמֶרְמָרוֹ נִהְפָּךְ לִבִּי בְּקֶרְבִּי כִּי מָרוּ מְרִיתִי מִחוּץ שְׂפֵלֶה-חֶרֶב בְּבֵית פָּמּוֹת:

20) *Take a good look Adonai at the distress that I am in. My spirit¹³⁰ (my innards) are in a ferment¹³¹! My heart has turned over¹³² within me. For how bitter I am¹³³! Outside the sword¹³⁴ slays¹³⁵ (bereaves), inside the house is death like¹³⁶.*

21) שְׁמָעוּ כִּי נֶאֱנָחָה אָנִי אֵין מְנַחֵם לִי כָּל-אִיבֵי שְׁמָעוּ רַעְתִּי שָׁשׂוּ כִּי אָתָּה עָשִׂיתָ הַבֵּאתָ יוֹם-קָרְאתָ וַיְהִיו כְּמוֹנֵי:

21) *When they heard how I was sighing, there was no one to comfort me. All my enemies heard of my plight and jeered! You did this! You have brought the day that you proclaimed. Let them become like me!*

¹²⁵ צָדִיק - **adj.** just, righteous (BDB).

¹²⁶ מָרָה - **vb.** be contentious, refractory, rebellious; have rebelled against (BDB).

¹²⁷ פֶּה - from a conversation with Dr. Adler: mouth, Word, God's pronouncements; mouth (BDB).

¹²⁸ רָמָה - **vb. Pi.** beguile, deal treacherously with (BDB).

¹²⁹ גָּוַע - **vb.** expire, perish, die; be empty, hungry (BDB).

¹³⁰ מַעֵה - **n.m.** only **pl.** internal organs, inward parts (intestines, bowels), belly (BDB).

¹³¹ חָמַר - **vb.** ferment, boil or foam up; "my bowels are in a ferment" (BDB).

¹³² הִפָּךְ - **Niph. Pf.** turn, overturn (BDB).

¹³³ This phrase is generally taken to mean "for I have indeed rebelled," but the admission of fault is not congruent with the expression of emotion in the rest of the verse. (Berlin).

¹³⁴ חֶרֶב - **n.f.** sword (BDB).

¹³⁵ שָׁכַל - **vb.** be bereaved; make childless (BDB).

¹³⁶ כְּמוֹת - "Many interpreters have found the particle כ in כְּמוֹת problematic. Taking it as "like death" forces the sense to be something less than death but similar to it - e.g., great suffering. This weakens the force of the phrase and goes against the common trope of describing death inside and outside the city. Gordis interprets the כ as asseverative (also in 5:3); that is, an emphatic particle. I find this the best interpretation." (Berlin)

22) תָּבֵא כָּל־רָעָתָם לְפָנַי וְעוֹלִל לְמוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר עוֹלֵלָתִי לִי עַל כָּל־פְּשָׁעַי כִּי־רַבּוֹת אַנְחָתִי וְלִבִּי דָוִי

22) *Let all the evil doers come before you, and deal with them as you have dealt with me for all my transgressions, for my sighs are many, and my heart is sick.*

Chapter Two

1) אֵיכָּה יַעֲיִב בָּאָפוֹ אֲדֹנָי אֶת־בִּת־צִיּוֹן הַשְּׁלִיךְ מִשָּׁמַיִם אֶרֶץ תַּפְאֶרֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא־זָכַר הַדָּם־רַגְלָיו בְּיוֹם אָפּוֹ:

1) *“How!?” In his wrath¹³⁷ Adonai covered the daughters of Zion in darkness¹³⁸. He hurled down¹³⁹ from the heavens to earth, the glory¹⁴⁰ of Israel, and did not remember his footstool¹⁴¹ on the day of his wrath!*

¹³⁷ אנה/אף - **n.m.** nostril, nose, face, anger (BDB)

¹³⁸ עוב - **vb. denom Hiph.** becloud, *Impf.* 3ms (BDB); Not used in Kal, Hiph. “to cover in darkness,” metaph., to render ignoble, to treat with indignity (<http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H5743&t=ESV>)

¹³⁹ שלך - **vb. Hiph. throw, fling, cast**, C. cast down, honor of Israel + acc. loc., מן lic., (BDB)

¹⁴⁰ פאר/תפארה - **n.f.** beauty, glory (BDB)

¹⁴¹ הדם - **n.m.** stool, footstool, always joined with רגלים; only in poet. and late writings, (properly something cast down, low). (BDB); Dr. Adler says, “This always refers to the קודש קודשים and specifically the top of the ארון העדות, the ark-cover.”

(2) בָּלַע אֲדֹנָי לֹא חָמַל אֶת כָּל־נְאוֹת יַעֲקֹב הָרַס בְּעֵבְרָתוֹ מִבְּצָרֵי בֵּת־יְהוּדָה הִגִּיעַ לָאָרֶץ חֲלָל מִמְלָכָה וְשָׂרֵיהָ:

- 2) *Adonai voraciously devoured all of Jacob's pastures of God¹⁴²; He has crushed¹⁴³ in anger the strongholds¹⁴⁴ of the daughters of Judah; He brought¹⁴⁵ to the ground, defiled¹⁴⁶ the kingdom and its princes.*

(3) גָּדַע בְּחַרְי־אָף כָּל קֶרֶן יִשְׂרָאֵל הִשְׁיב אַחֲזֹר יְמִינוֹ מִפְּנֵי אוֹיֵב וַיִּבְעֶר בְּיַעֲקֹב כָּאֵשׁ לֶהֱבֶה אֶכְלָה סָבִיב:

- 3) *He mutilated¹⁴⁷¹⁴⁸ every horn¹⁴⁹ of Israel. He has withdrawn his right hand in the face of the enemy, and he burns¹⁵⁰ Jacob with all consuming¹⁵¹¹⁵² fire.*

(4) דָּרַךְ קִשְׁתּוֹ כְּאוֹיֵב נָצַב יְמִינוֹ כְּצֹר וַיַּהַרֵּג כָּל מַחֲמַדֵּי־עֵין בְּאֵהָל בֵּת־צִיּוֹן שָׁפַךְ כָּאֵשׁ חֲמָתוֹ:

- 4) *He bent¹⁵³ his bow like an enemy, he set¹⁵⁴ his right hand like a foe, and killed all that is precious to my eye. The fury of his anger¹⁵⁵ poured¹⁵⁶ (down) like fire on the tent of the daughters of Zion!*

¹⁴² נֹה - **n. f.** pasture, meadow, *pastures of God, meadows of peace* (BDB); Berlin cites: Hebrew נְאוֹת, means pastureland or dwelling place.

¹⁴³ הָרַס - **vb.** throw down, break or tear down, bruise, bray, pound, crush (BDB)

¹⁴⁴ מִבְּצָר - **n.m.** fortification

¹⁴⁵ נָגַע - **Hiph. Pf.** cause to touch; reach, approach, arrive, i.e. bring to ground (BDB)

¹⁴⁶ חֲלָל - **vb.** pollute, defile, profane (BDB)

¹⁴⁷ גָּדַע - **Qal Pf.** hew, hew down or off; cut off hand or other member, mutilate (BDB)

¹⁴⁸ חָרִי - **n.m.** burning of God (BDB)

¹⁴⁹ קֶרֶן - **n.f.** horn (BDB)

¹⁵⁰ בָּעַר - **vb.** burn, consume (BDB)

¹⁵¹ לֶהֱבֶה - **n.f.** flame, poet.

¹⁵² אָכַל - **vb.** eat, devour, consume, destroy (BDB), a destructive act (Dr. Adler)

¹⁵³ דָּרַךְ - **vb. tread, march**; 4. tread (i.e. bend) the bow, as bow in hand of Adonai (BDB)

¹⁵⁴ נָצַב - **vb. Niph.** take one's stand, be stationed (BDB)

¹⁵⁵ חֲמָה - **n.f.** heat, rage, in the fury of his power (BDB)

¹⁵⁶ שָׁפַךְ - **vb.** pour out, pour, pour out anger (BDB)

(5) הָיָה אֲדֹנָי כְּאוֹיֵב בָּלַע יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּלַע כָּל-אַרְמוֹתֶיהָ שָׁחַת מִבְצָרָיו וַיִּרְבַּ בְּבֵית-יְהוּדָה תִּאֲנִיָּה וְאֲנִיָּה:

- 5) *Adonai has acted like an enemy; he has engulfed¹⁵⁷ Israel, ruined all her fortresses, destroyed her strongholds and he has greatly increased in the House of Judah mourning¹⁵⁸ (and sadness)!*

(6) וַיַּחֲמֹס כֶּגֶן שָׂכֹו שָׁחַת מוֹעֲדוֹ שָׁפַח יְהוָה בְּצִיּוֹן מוֹעֵד וְשַׁבָּת וַיִּנְאֹץ בְּזַעַם-אָפוֹ מֶלֶךְ וְכֹהֵן:

- 6) *He violated¹⁵⁹ his temporary garden hut; he utterly ruined¹⁶⁰ his sacred times¹⁶¹, Adonai caused Zion to forget festival times and Shabbat and has turned his back¹⁶² in resentment¹⁶³ and anger (on) king and priest.*

(7) זָנַח אֲדֹנָי מִזְבְּחוֹ נָאֵר מִקִּדְשׁוֹ הִסְגִּיר בְּיַד-אוֹיֵב חֹמַת אַרְמוֹתֶיהָ קוֹל נִתְּנוֹ בְּבֵית-יְהוָה כִּיּוֹם מוֹעֵד:

- 7) *Adonai rejected¹⁶⁴ his altar, detested¹⁶⁵ his sanctuary. He delivered in to¹⁶⁶ the hand of the enemy the walls of her fortresses and gave a shout in the House of Adonai, as on a festival day.*

¹⁵⁷ בלע - **vb.** swallow down, swallow up 2. engulf, fig. of destruction, ruin (BDB)

¹⁵⁸ אֲנִיָּה - **n.f.** mourning (both times in combination) (BDB)

¹⁵⁹ חָמַס - **vb.** treat violently, wrong (BDB)

¹⁶⁰ שָׁחַת - **vb.** go to ruin, ruin temple (BDB); to utterly destroy with intensity (Dr. Adler)

¹⁶¹ מוֹעֵד - **n.m.** appointed time, place, meeting (BDB)

¹⁶² נִאֹץ - **vb.** condemn, spurn (BDB)

¹⁶³ זַעַם - **n. m.** indignation (BDB)

¹⁶⁴ זָנַח - **vb.** reject, spurn, be angry (BDB)

¹⁶⁵ נָאֵר - **vb.** only **Pi.** exact meaning uncertain; prob. abhor, spurn (BDB)

¹⁶⁶ סָגַר - **vb.** shut, close; **Hiph.** deliver up to (BDB)

(8) חָשַׁב יְהוָה לְהַשְׁחִית חֹמַת בֵּת־צִיּוֹן נָטָה קוֹ לֹא־הִשִּׁיב יָדוֹ מִבִּלְעַ וַיֹּאבֶל־חֵל וְחוֹמָה יַחַדוֹ אֲמָלְלוּ:

- 8) *Adonai devised a plan¹⁶⁷ to obliterate the wall of the daughters of Zion. He stretched¹⁶⁸ a line¹⁶⁹ and did not hold back his hand from destruction. He caused fortress¹⁷⁰ and wall to lament. They languish¹⁷¹ together.*

(9) טָבְעוּ בָאָרֶץ שַׁעֲרֶיהָ אֲבַד וְשֹׁבֵר בְּרִיחֶיהָ מְלָכָה וְשָׂרֶיהָ בַּגּוֹיִם אֵין תּוֹרָה גַּם־נְבִיאֶיהָ לֹא־מָצְאוּ חֲזוֹן מִיְהוָה:

- 9) *You have sunk¹⁷² her gates into the ground, wrecked and shattered her bars¹⁷³ (of her gates). Her king and princes are among the nations, Torah (Instruction) is no more, and her prophets have found no vision¹⁷⁴ from Adonai.*

(10) יֵשְׁבוּ לָאָרֶץ יְדָמוּ זִקְנֵי בֵּת־צִיּוֹן הָעָלוּ עֶפֶר עַל־רֹאשָׁם חָגְרוּ שָׁקִים הוֹרִידוּ לָאָרֶץ רָאשֵׁן בְּתוֹלַת יְרוּשָׁלַם:

- 10) *The Elders of Zion sat on the ground, stupefied and astounded.¹⁷⁵ They threw¹⁷⁶ dust on their heads, girded¹⁷⁷ themselves in sackcloth¹⁷⁸; the virgins of Jerusalem bowed their heads down to the ground.*

¹⁶⁷ חשב - **vb.** think, account; devise, plan, mean to (BDB)

¹⁶⁸ - נטה - **vb.** stretch out, spread out, extend, incline, bend; stretch line and plummet (BDB)

¹⁶⁹ קו - **n.m.** line (BDB)

¹⁷⁰ חל - **n.m.** rampart, fortress, surrounding wall (BDB)

¹⁷¹ אמל - **vb.** be weak, languish (BDB)

¹⁷² טבע - **vb.** sink, sink down (gates of Jerusalem into ground) (BDB)

¹⁷³ בריח - **n.m.** bar (BDB)

¹⁷⁴ חזון - **n.m.** vision, from Adonai (BDB)

¹⁷⁵ - דמם - **vb.** be or grow dumb, silent, be astounded, stupefied (BDB)

¹⁷⁶ עלה - **Hiph.** cause to ascend, throw dust on the head (BDB)

¹⁷⁷ חגר - **vb.** gird, gird on, gird oneself - **Qal. pf. 3 pl** (BDB)

¹⁷⁸ שק - sackcloth: worn in mourning and humiliation (BDB)

11) כָּלוּ בַדְמָעוֹת עֵינַי תִּמְרָמוֹרוּ מֵעַי נִשְׁפָּף לָאָרֶץ כִּבְדִּי עַל־שָׂכָר בַּת־עַמִּי יַעֲטֹף עוֹלִל וַיּוֹנֵק בְּרַחֲבוֹת קִרְיָה:

11) *My eyes (strained by looking for relief) are spent¹⁷⁹ with tears, my stomach churned,¹⁸⁰ my guts poured out to the ground,¹⁸¹ over the destruction of (the daughter) my people. Little children and babies collapse¹⁸² in the streets of the city.*

12) לְאִמָּתָם יֹאמְרוּ אֵיךְ דָּגוּ וַיִּזְנוּ בְּהִתְעַטָּפָם בְּחִלְלֵי בְּרַחֲבוֹת עִיר בְּהִשְׁתַּפֵּף נַפְשָׁם אֶל־חֵיק אִמָּתָם:

12) *They say to their mothers, “Where is grain and wine?” As they collapse as if pierced¹⁸³ in the streets of the city, their lives pouring out¹⁸⁴, dying into their mothers’ bosoms¹⁸⁵.*

13) מָה־אֶעֱיִדָּךְ מָה אֲדַמָּה־לָּךְ הִבַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם מָה אֲשֹׁנֶה־לָּךְ וְאֶנְחִימָךְ בְּתוֹלַת בַּת־צִיּוֹן כִּי־גָדוֹל כַּיָּם שִׁבְרָךְ מִי יִרְפָּא־לָּךְ:

13) *What can I testify to you?¹⁸⁶ What can I compare¹⁸⁷ to you? Oh, daughter of Jerusalem, to what can I liken¹⁸⁸ you that I may comfort you, dear virgin daughter of Zion. For as vast as the sea is your destruction! Who will heal you?*

¹⁷⁹ כלה - **vb.** spent; be spent, used up, of water, be exhausted, strained by looking for relief or refreshment, pine, languish (BDB)

¹⁸⁰ - See footnote 117

¹⁸¹ כבד - **n.m.** liver of man, as pierced by arrow; poured out in sorrow (BDB)

¹⁸² עטף - **vb.** be feeble, faint (BDB)

¹⁸³ חלל - **vb.** bore, pierce, slain, wounded (BDB)

¹⁸⁴ שפך - **vb.** pour out, nerveless, helpless (BDB)

¹⁸⁵ חיק - **n.m.** bosom, of infants dying in their mothers’ arms; of carrying insults in one’s bosom (BDB)

¹⁸⁶ עוד - **vb. denom.** bear witness; testify (BDB)

¹⁸⁷ דמה - **vb.** be like, resemble, liken, compare (BDB)

¹⁸⁸ שוה - **vb.** be like, resemble (BDB)

14) נְבִיאֶיךָ חָזוּ לְךָ שָׂוֹא וְתַפֵּל וְלֹא־גִלּוּ עַל־עֲוֹנֶיךָ לְהַשְׁיב שְׁבִיתְךָ וַיַּחֲזִיז לְךָ מִשְׁאוֹת שָׂוֹא וּמַדּוּחִים:

14) *Your prophets envisioned¹⁸⁹ for you lies¹⁹⁰, they did not expose¹⁹¹ your sins¹⁹² so as to return you from captivity. They have prophesied false and seductive oracles¹⁹³.*

15. סָפְקוּ עֲלֶיךָ כַּפִּים כָּל־עַבְרֵי דָרְךָ שָׁרְקוּ וַיִּנְעוּ רֹאשָׁם עַל־בֵּת יְרוּשָׁלַם הַזֹּאת הָעִיר שֶׁאָמְרוּ כָלִילַת יָפִי מְשׁוֹשׁ לְכָל־הָאָרֶץ:

15. *All who pass along the way clap¹⁹⁴ their hands at you; they hiss¹⁹⁵ and shake¹⁹⁶ their heads at the daughters of Jerusalem! “Is this the city that they said was the perfection¹⁹⁷ of beauty, a joy¹⁹⁸ to all the Earth?”*

16. פָּצוּ עֲלֶיךָ פִּיהֶם כָּל־אֹיְבֶיךָ שָׁרְקוּ וַיַּחֲרִקוּ־שֵׁן אֹמְרוּ בְלָעֲנִי אֵף זֶה הַיּוֹם שֶׁקִּוִּינָהּ מִצָּאֲנֹו רָאִינוּ:

16. *They opened¹⁹⁹ their mouths against you, all of your enemies. They whistled and gnashed²⁰⁰ their teeth. They said, “We have swallowed her up. This is indeed the day we have waited²⁰¹ for. We’ve succeeded in seeing it.*

¹⁸⁹ חזה - **vb.** (almost wholly poet.) see, behold, deceitful things, see a vision for one, perceive (BDB)

¹⁹⁰ שוא - **n.m.** emptiness, vanity, empty, complaining (BDB)

¹⁹¹ תפל - uncert., whitewash (Ez. 22:29), something unsalted, insipid, dull; tasteless, unseasoned. (A Reader's Hebrew Bible), 1425.

¹⁹² עון - **n.m.** iniquity, guilt, or punishment of iniquity (BDB)

¹⁹³ מדוח - **n.m.** a thing to draw aside; enticement (BDB)

¹⁹⁴ ספק - **vb.** slap, clap (BDB)

¹⁹⁵ שרק - hiss, whistle (BDB)

¹⁹⁶ נוע - **vb.** quiver, wave, waver, tremble, totter (BDB)

¹⁹⁷ כליל - **n.m.** completeness, perfection; “out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, hath God sinned” (BDB)

¹⁹⁸ שוש/משוש - **vb.** exult, rejoice (BDB)

¹⁹⁹ פצה - **vb.** part, open (BDB)

²⁰⁰ חרק - **vb.** gnash or grind their teeth, only poet. (BDB)

²⁰¹ קוה - **vb.** wait for (BDB)

17. עֲשֵׂה יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר זָמַם בַּצֵּעַ אֶמְרָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה מִימֵי־קֶדֶם הָרָס וְלֹא חָמַל וַיִּשְׁמַח עָלֶיךָ אוֹיֵב הָרִים
קִרְוֹ צָרֶיךָ:

17. *Adonai did what he devised,²⁰² he accomplished by violence²⁰³ without pity. He has crushed²⁰⁴ without sparing²⁰⁵, and he made enemies rejoice over you, he raised the might of your foes.*

18. צִעַק לִבָּם אֶל־אֲדֹנָי הוֹמַת בַּת־צִיּוֹן הוֹרִידִי כִנְחַל דְּמָעָה יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה אֶל־תִּתְּנִי פוּגַת לֶךְ אֶל־תִּדְּמִם
בַּת־עֵינֶיךָ:

18. *Their heart cried²⁰⁶ out to Adonai. Oh wall of daughter Zion. Let tears run down like a river day and night. Give yourself no relief,²⁰⁷ your eyes no rest.*

19. קוּמִי רִנִּי בַלַּיִל לְרֹאשׁ אֲשִׁמְרוֹת שְׁפָכִי כַמִּים לִבֶּךָ נִכַּח פָּנֵי אֲדֹנָי שְׁאֵי אֵלָיו כַּפְּיָךְ עַל־נֶפֶשׁ עוֹלָלֶיךָ
הַעֲטוּפִים בְּרָעַב בְּרֹאשׁ כָּל־חֻצוֹת:

19. *Get up and cry out²⁰⁸ at night, at the beginning of the watches²⁰⁹. Pour out your heart like water before²¹⁰ the presence of the Adonai; lift²¹¹ up you hands toward him and beg for your infant's lives (who are) collapsing²¹² from starvation²¹³ at the head of every street.*

²⁰² זָמַם - **vb.** consider, purpose, devise (BDB)

²⁰³ בַּצֵּעַ - **vb.** cut off, break off, gain by violence (BDB)

²⁰⁴ הָרָס - **vb.** thrown down, break or tear down (BDB)

²⁰⁵ חָמַל - **vb.** spare (BDB)

²⁰⁶ צִעַק - **vb.** cry, cry out, call (BDB) Berlin notes that the first verb (צִעַק) is problematic since it is masculine singular, while those that follow are feminine singular, referring to the wall.

²⁰⁷ פוּגַה - **n.f.** benumbing, cessation; "grant thyself no benumbing" (BDB)

²⁰⁸ רִנֵּן - **vb.** give a ringing cry, in summons, exhortation of wisdom (BDB)

²⁰⁹ אֲשִׁמְרָה - **n.f.** watch (division of time) (BDB)

²¹⁰ נִכַּח - **subst.** front, always in **prep.** or **adv.**; "was before thy face" (BDB)

²¹¹ נִשָּׂא - **vb.** lift, carry, take (BDB)

²¹² עֲטָף - **vb.** be feeble, faint

²¹³ רָעַב - **n.m.** famine, hunger (BDB)

20. רָאָה יְהוָה וְהִבִּיטָה לְמִי עֲוֹלָתָהּ כֹּה אִם־תֹּאכְלֶנָּה נָשִׁים פְּרִים עֲלֵלִי טַפְחִים אִם־יִהְיֶה בְּמִקְדָּשׁ אֲדֹנָי כִּהֵּן וְנָבִיא:

20. *Take a good look Adonai, and see me (look at who you did this too)! Should women eat of their babies that were healthy²¹⁴? Should priests and prophets be killed in Adonai's sanctuary?*

21. שָׁכְבוּ לְאֶרֶץ חוּצוֹת נַעַר וְזָקֵן בְּתוֹלְתֵי וּבַחוּרֵי נָפְלוּ בְּחֶרֶב הֶרְגָת בַּיּוֹם אַפָּה טַבַּחַת לֹא חֲמָלָת:

21. *Lying on the ground outside are young and old. My virgins and young men have fallen by the sword. You have killed on your day of anger, you have slaughtered without mercy.*

22. תִּקְרָא כַּיּוֹם מוֹעֵד מַגּוּרֵי מִסְכִּיב וְלֹא הָיָה בַּיּוֹם אֶפְי־יְהוָה פָּלִיט וְשָׂרִיד אֲשֶׁר־טַפַּחְתִּי וְרַבִּיתִי אִיבִי כָלָם:

22. *You summoned as if on a festival day, my neighbors roundabout. And no one, on the day of Adonai's anger, escaped²¹⁵ or survived²¹⁶. Those whom I bore and reared my enemy has annihilated.*

Chapter Three

1. אֲנִי הַגֹּבֵר רָאָה עָנִי בְּשֹׁבֵט עֲבָרָתוֹ:

1. *I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath!*

2. אוֹתִי נָהַג וַיִּלְךָ חֹשֶׁךְ וְלֹא־אֹור:

2. *I am the one he has led and forced to walk in darkness without light.*

3. אַף בִּי יָשָׁב יַהֲפֹךְ יָדוֹ כָּל־הַיּוֹם:

3. *On me alone over and over he brings down his hand.*

4. בָּלָה בְּשָׂרִי וְעוֹרִי שֹׁבֵר עֲצָמוֹתַי:

4. *He has pulverized my flesh and skin, and smashed my bones.*

²¹⁴ טפח - n.m. pl. abstr. dandling (BDB)

²¹⁵ פליט - n.m. escaped one, fugitive (BDB)

²¹⁶ שריד - n.m. survivor (BDB)

5. בָּנָה עָלַי וַיִּקְרַח רֹאשׁ וַתִּלְאַחַהּ:

5. *He has surround me²¹⁷ with poison²¹⁸ and entrapped me in a constant state of misery²¹⁹.*

6. בְּמַחְשָׁכִים הוֹשִׁיבָנִי כַּמֵּתִי עוֹלָם:

6. *He made me dwell in darkness like those who have been dead for years and years.*

7. גָּדַר בַּעֲדִי וְלֹא אֵצָא הַכְּבִיד נִחְשָׁתִי:

7. *He has walled²²⁰ me in and I cannot escape, I am weighed down with chains.*

8. גַּם כִּי אֶזְעַק וְאֶשׁוּעַ שְׁתֵּם תִּפְלֹתִי:

8. *Though I cry out²²¹ and call for help²²² he shuts²²³ out my prayer.*

9. גָּדַר דְּרָכִי בְּגִזִּית נְתִיבֹתַי עוֹה:

9. *He has walled in the way with immovable stone²²⁴, he has twisted²²⁵ my paths²²⁶.*

²¹⁷ vb. go around (BDB) - נקח

²¹⁸ n.m. (רוש) a bitter and poisonous herb, then venom (BDB) - ראש

²¹⁹ n.f. weariness, hardship, distress (BDB); “State of misery that goes on and on, “When is this going to end?” (from a conversation with Dr. Adler).

²²⁰ vb. wall up or off, build a wall (BDB) - דגר

²²¹ vb. cry, cry out, call (BDB) - זעק

²²² vb. Pi. cry out for help (BDB) - שוע

²²³ vb. usu. stop up, in sense of shut out, shut ears against, “hath shut out my prayer” (BDB) - שתם

²²⁴ n.f. a cutting, hewing, building stones, hewn stones (BDB) - גזית

²²⁵ vb. bend, twist, be bent, twisted; “hath he twisted” (BDB) - עוה

²²⁶ n.f. id.; path - נתיב

10. דב אֵרֵב הוּא לִי אֲרִיָּה בְּמַסְתָּרִים:

10. *He is a bear²²⁷ lying²²⁸ in wait, lurking; like a lion²²⁹ in ambush²³⁰.*

11. דָּרְכֵי סוֹרֵר וַיִּפְשְׁחֵנִי שְׁמִנִי שָׁמָּה:

11. *He has led me into danger²³¹ and torn me into pieces²³², leaving me devastated²³³.*

12. דָּרַךְ קִשְׁתּוֹ וַיַּצִּיבֵנִי כַּמָּטָרָא לַחֲזִין:

12. *He bent²³⁴ his bow²³⁵ and set me as a target²³⁶, a mark²³⁷, for his arrow²³⁸.*

13. הֵבִיא בְּכָלִיּוֹתַי בְּנֵי אֲשָׁפְתּוֹ:

13. *He shot all the arrows of his quiver²³⁹ into my guts²⁴⁰.*

14. הָיִיתִי שְׂחֹק לְכָל־עַמִּי נִגְיָנָתָם כָּל־הַיּוֹם:

14. *I have become the laughingstock²⁴¹ of all my people, the butt of their mocking song²⁴² all day long.*

²²⁷ דב - **n.m.** bear (BDB)

²²⁸ ארב - **vb.** lie in wait (BDB)

²²⁹ אריה - **n.m.** lion (BDB)

²³⁰ מסתר - **n.m.** secret place, hiding place; (סתר) (BDB)

²³¹ סור/סור - **Polel pf. 3ms.** “he turned aside my ways (my steps).” (BDB)

²³² פשח - **vb. Pi.** tear in pieces (BDB)

²³³ שמם - **vb.** be desolated, appalled (BDB)

²³⁴ דרך - **vb.** tread (i.e. bend) the bow, a bow in hand (BDB)

²³⁵ קשת - **n.f.** bow (BDB)

²³⁶ נצב - **vb. Niph.** take one’s stand, stand, “set me as a target” (BDB)

²³⁷ מטרה/נטר - **n.f.** target, mark (BDB)

²³⁸ חץ - **n.m.** arrow (BDB)

²³⁹ אשפה - **n.f.** quiver for arrows (BDB)

²⁴⁰ כליה - **n.f.** kidneys (BDB)

²⁴¹ שחק - **n.m.** laughter, derision, sport (BDB)

²⁴² נגינה - **n.f.** music, “subject of mocking song” (BDB)

15. השְׂפִיעַנִי בַמְרוֹרִים הָרוֹנִי לַעֲנָה:

15. *He has filled me²⁴³ with bitterness, he has made me drunk²⁴⁴ with wormwood²⁴⁵.*

16. וַיִּגְרַם בְּחֶצֶץ שְׁנֵי הַכְּפִישָׁנִי בְּאֶפֶר:

16. *And he crushed²⁴⁶ my teeth²⁴⁷ with gravel²⁴⁸ and made me cower²⁴⁹ in the dust.*

17. וַתִּזְנַח מִשְׁלוֹם נַפְשִׁי נְשִׁיתִי טוֹבָה:

17. *Peace has spurned me²⁵⁰, I have forgotten what goodness is.*

18. וְאָמַר אֲבָד נִצְחִי וְתוֹחֲלִתִי מִיְּהוָה:

18. *So I said, “My endurance²⁵¹ has perished²⁵² and so has my hope²⁵³ from Adonai.”*

19. זְכַר-עֲנִי וּמְרוּדִי לַעֲנָה וְרָאשׁ:

19. *Remembering my pain and trouble²⁵⁴, is like wormwood and gall.*

²⁴³ שבע - **vb.** be sated, satisfied (BDB)

²⁴⁴ רוה - **vb.** be saturated, drink one's fill (BDB)

²⁴⁵ לענה - wormwood, only fig. of bitter things: of chastisement (BDB)

²⁴⁶ גרס - **vb.** be crushed; “he hath crushed my teeth with gravel,” fig. of divine chastisement. (BDB)

²⁴⁷ שן - tooth

²⁴⁸ חֶצֶץ - **n.m.** gravel, “and he hath crushed my teeth with gravel stones, fig. of Adonai's dealings with sufferer” (BDB)

²⁴⁹ כפש - **vb.** only **Hiph** make bent, press or bend together, “he made cower in the ashes” (BDB)

²⁵⁰ זנח - **vb.** reject, spurn (BDB)

²⁵¹ נצה - **n.m.** eminence, enduring, everlastingness, perpetuity, “my endurance doth vanish” (BDB)

²⁵² אבד - **vb.** perish, vanish (BDB)

²⁵³ יחל/תוחלת - **n.f.** hope (BDB)

²⁵⁴ מְרוּד - **n.m.** restlessness, straying (BDB); מְרוּד “her trouble,” is a rare word. It may derive either from the root מרד or from רדה. (Berlin)

20. זָכוֹר תִּזְכּוֹר וְתִשׁוּחַ עָלַי נִפְשִׁי:

20. *I have ruminated about it over and over until²⁵⁵, I have been brought to my knees.*

21. זֹאת אָשִׁיב אֶל־לְבִי עַל־כֵּן אוֹחִיל:

21. *This I take to heart²⁵⁶ therefore I wait hopefully²⁵⁷.*

22. חֶסֶדִי יְהוָה כִּי לֹא־תִמָּנוּ כִּי לֹא־כָלוּ רַחֲמָיו:

22. *Surely Adonai's kindness will not end for us; indeed his compassion is not used up.*

23. חֲדָשִׁים לַבִּקְרִים רַבָּה אֲמוּנָתָהּ:

23. *They are renewed every morning; great is your loyalty and dependability!*

24. חֲלָקִי יְהוָה אָמְרָה נִפְשִׁי עַל־כֵּן אוֹחִיל לוֹ:

24. *Adonai is my portion I say to myself, therefore I wait for him.*

25. טוֹב יְהוָה לִקְנוֹ לְנֶפֶשׁ תִּדְרָשָׁנּוּ:

25. *Adonai is good to those who wait²⁵⁸ for him, to the creature that seeks him²⁵⁹.*

26. טוֹב וַיִּחַל וְדוּמָם לְתִשׁוּעַת יְהוָה:

26. *It is good to wait in silence²⁶⁰ for the salvation²⁶¹ of Adonai.*

27. טוֹב לִגְבֹּר כִּי־יֵשֵׂא עַל בְּנֵעוּרָיו:

27. *It is good for a man to carry²⁶² the yoke in his youth.*

²⁵⁵ שוּחַ - **vb.** sink down, depression, excavation, reservoir, melt away, vanish (BDB)

²⁵⁶ שׁוּב - **vb.** turn back, return; bring back to mind, take into consideration (BDB)

²⁵⁷ יָחַל - wait, await (BDB)

²⁵⁸ קוּה - **vb.** wait for (BDB)

²⁵⁹ דָּרַשׁ - **vb.** resort to, seek (BDB)

²⁶⁰ דוּמָם - **n.m.** in silence, silently (BDB)

²⁶¹ תִּשׁוּעָה - **n.f.** deliverance, salvation, or of national deliverance under fig. of personal (BDB)

²⁶² נָשָׂא - 2. Bear, carry: a. lit.; a load or burden (BDB)

28. יֵשֶׁב בְּדָד וַיִּדָּם כִּי נָטַל עָלָיו:

28. *Let him sit alone in silence when he is burdened with it.*

29. יִתֵּן בְּעַפְרָא פִּיהוּ אוֹלֵי יֵשׁ תִּקְוָה:

29. *Let him put his mouth into the dust, perhaps there is hope.*

30. יִתֵּן לְמִכְהוּ לִחֵי יִשָּׁבַע בְּחֶרֶף:

30. *He should give to his smiter²⁶³ his cheek²⁶⁴, let him be sated²⁶⁵ with shame²⁶⁶.*

31. כִּי לֹא יִזְנַח לְעוֹלָם אֲדֹנָי:

31. *For the Lord with not reject him²⁶⁷ forever.*

32. כִּי אִם־הוֹגָה וְרַחֵם כָּרַב חֲסֵדוֹ:

32. *For if he causes grief²⁶⁸, he will have compassion, for his kindness is great.*

33. כִּי לֹא עָנָה מִלְּבוֹ וַיִּגָּה בְּנִי־אִישׁ

33. *Because he does not afflict maliciously or grieve human beings.*

34. לְדַכּא תַּחַת רַגְלָיו כָּל אֲסִירֵי אֶרֶץ:

34. *To crush²⁶⁹ under his feet all the imprisoned²⁷⁰.*

²⁶³ נכה - **vb.** smite (BDB)

²⁶⁴ לחה - **n.m.** jaw, cheek (BDB)

²⁶⁵ שבע - **vb.** be sated, satisfied, have in excess, be surfeited with (BDB)

²⁶⁶ חרפה - **n.f.** reproach; injuries from enemies (BDB)

²⁶⁷ זנח - **vb.** reject, spurn (BDB)

²⁶⁸ יגה - **vb.** suffer, cause grief or sorrow (BDB)

²⁶⁹ דכא - **vb.** crush, poet. (BDB)

²⁷⁰ אסיר - **n.m.** bondman, prisoner; specif. of liberated exiles of Isr. (BDB)

35. לְהַטּוֹת מִשְׁפָּט־גֹּבֵר נֶגֶד פָּנָיו עֲלִיּוֹן:

35. *To distort justice²⁷¹ for a man before the Highest one²⁷².*

36. לְעֵיִת אָדָם בְּרִיבּוֹ אֲדֹנָי לֹא רָאָה:

36. *Adonai does not incriminate²⁷³ a man for bringing a complaint²⁷⁴.*

37. מִי זֶה אָמַר וַתְּהִי אֲדֹנָי לֹא צָוָה:

37. *Whose utterance was ever fulfilled unless God commanded?*

38. מִפִּי עֲלִיּוֹן לֹא תֵצֵא הָרְעוֹת וְהַטּוֹב:

38. *Is it not from the mouth of the most high that the bad and the good are decreed?*

39. מִה־יִתְאוּגֵן אָדָם חֵי גֹבֵר עַל־חַטָּאוֹ:

39. *Why should a living man complain²⁷⁵ about the consequences of his sins.*

40. נַחֲפֹשֶׁה דְרָכֵינוּ וְנַחֲקִרְהָ וְנִשׁוּבָה עַד־יְהוָה:

40. *Let us search²⁷⁶ and examine²⁷⁷ our ways and return to Adonai!*

41. נִשְׂא לִבֵּנוּ אֶל־כַּפָּיִם אֶל־אֵל בְּשָׁמַיִם:

41. *We raise our hearts and our hands to God in heaven.*

²⁷¹ נטה - **vb.** stretch out, spread out, extend, incline, bend; **g.** thrust aside, esp. c. acc. משפט of perverting or wresting justice (BDB)

²⁷² עליון - **n.m.** Highest, Most High (BDB)

²⁷³ עות - **vb.** be bent, crooked; make crooked (BDB)

²⁷⁴ ריב - **n.m.** strife, dispute (BDB)

²⁷⁵ אנן - **vb.** only **Hithpo.** complain, murmur (BDB)

²⁷⁶ חפש - **vb.** search (BDB)

²⁷⁷ חקר - **vb.** search (BDB)

42. נִחַנּוּ פִּשְׁעֵנוּ וּמְרִינוּ אֶתְּהָ לֹא סָלַחְתָּ:

42. *We have transgressed²⁷⁸ and rebelled²⁷⁹. You have not forgiven.*

43. סִכַּתְּהָ בְּאַף וַתִּרְדֵּפֵנוּ הִרְגַּתָּ לֹא חֲמִלְתָּ:

43. *You have covered yourself²⁸⁰ in anger and pursued us. You have killed without pity.*

44. סִכַּתְּהָ בְּעֵנָן לָךְ מֵעֶבֶר תִּפְלֶה:

44. *You have covered yourself in that cloud²⁸¹ of yours, so that prayer could not pass through²⁸².*

45. סָחִי וּמָאוֹס תְּשִׁימֵנוּ בְּקֶרֶב הָעַמִּים:

45. *Dung²⁸³ and trash²⁸⁴ you have made us among²⁸⁵ the people.*

46. פָּצוּ עֲלֵינוּ פִּיהֶם כָּל־אֹיְבֵינוּ:

46. *All of our enemies open their mouths against us.*

47. פָּחַד וּפַחַת הָיָה לָנוּ הַשָּׂאת וְהַשְׁבֵּר:

47. *Dread²⁸⁶ and disaster²⁸⁷ were ours, devastation²⁸⁸ and destruction.*

²⁷⁸ פשע - **vb.** rebel, transgress (BDB)

²⁷⁹ מרה - **vb.** be contentious, refractory, rebellious (BDB)

²⁸⁰ סכך - **vb.** overshadow, screen, cover (BDB)

²⁸¹ ענן - **n.m.** cloud-mass, cloud (BDB)

²⁸² עבר - **vb.** pass over, through, by, pass on; traverse (BDB)

²⁸³ סחי - **n.m.** offscouring (BDB)

²⁸⁴ מאוס - refuse, trash, repulsive, loathsome, despicable, abominable (<http://www.morfix.co.>)

²⁸⁵ קרב - **n.m.** inward part, midst (BDB)

²⁸⁶ פחד - **vb.** dread, be in dread, in awe (BDB)

²⁸⁷ פחת - **n.m.** pit (BDB)

²⁸⁸ שאת - **n.f.** doubtful word; perh. din of battle; devastation, desolation (BDB)

48. פְּלִגֵּי־מַיִם תִּרְדַּ עֵינַי עַל־נִשְׁכָּר בַּת־עַמִּי:

48. *Streams of water run down my eyes because of the destruction of the daughters of my people.*

49. עֵינַי נִגְרָה וְלֹא תִדְמָה מֵאִין הַפְּגוֹת:

49. *My eyes will pour²⁸⁹ and will not cease²⁹⁰, without stopping²⁹¹.*

50. עַד־יִשְׁקִיף וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה מִשָּׁמַיִם:

50. *Until Adonai looks down and sees from heaven.*

51. עֵינַי עוֹלֵלָה לְנַפְשִׁי מִכָּל בָּנוֹת עִירִי:

51. *My eyes are aching²⁹² for all the daughters of my city²⁹³.*

52. צוֹד צָדוֹנִי כַצֶּפֶר אֵיבֵי חֲנָם:

52. *My enemies hunt²⁹⁴ me like a bird for no reason²⁹⁵.*

53. אָמְתוּ בַּבּוֹר חַיִּי וַיִּדוּ־אֶכֶן בִּי:

53. *They have thrown me in a pit²⁹⁶ and heaped stones on me²⁹⁷.*

²⁸⁹ נגר - **vb.** pour, flow, run (BDB)

²⁹⁰ דמה - **vb.** cease, cause to cease, cut off, destroy (BDB)

²⁹¹ הפגה/פוג - **n.f.** of weeping; form very strange (BDB)

²⁹² עלל - **vb. Poel**, act severely; my eye deals severely with me, i.e. gives me pain (BDB)

²⁹³ נפש - "The phrase is difficult. I have accepted the usual rendering although it is less than intelligible. A not in NJPS suggests emending "my eye" to "my affliction," according to which vv.50-51 would read: "Until the Lord looks down from heaven/and beholds my affliction./The Lord has brought me grief." (Berlin)

²⁹⁴ צוד - **vb.** hunt (BDB)

²⁹⁵ חנם - **subs.**, used chiefly in the accus. as **adv.** "my haters without cause" (BDB)

²⁹⁶ צמת - **vb.** put an end to, exterminate, poet.; "they have put an end to my life" (BDB)

²⁹⁷ ידה - **vb.** throw, cast, "and they cast (stones) on me" (BDB)

54. צָפוּ-מִים עַל-רֹאשִׁי אָמַרְתִּי נִגְזַרְתִּי:

54. *Water rushed²⁹⁸ over my head; I screamed, “I am doomed²⁹⁹!”*

55. קָרָאתִי שְׁמֶךָ יְהוָה מִבּוֹר תַּחְתִּיּוֹת:

55. *I called your name, Adonai, from the bottomless pit³⁰⁰!*

56. קוֹלִי שָׁמַעְתָּ אֶל-תַּעֲלָם אֲזַנְךָ לְרוֹחֹתִי לְשׁוֹעֲתִי:

56. *You heard my voice! Do not deafen³⁰¹ your ears to my cry for help!*

57. קָרַבְתָּ בְּיוֹם אֶקְרָאָךָ אָמַרְתָּ אֶל-תִּירָא:

57. *You drew me near³⁰² on that day when I cried out and you said, “Do not fear.”*

58. רַבָּתְּ אֲדֹנָי רִיבִי נִפְשִׁי גָאֵלְתָּ תִּי:

58. *Adonai, you have upheld my cause, you have redeemed my life.*

59. רָאִיתָה יְהוָה עֲוֹתַתִּי שְׁפָטָה מִשְׁפָּטִי:

59. *Look at me, Adonai, at my affliction. Judge me with justice.*

60. רָאִיתָה כָּל-נִקְמָתָם כָּל-מַחֲשַׁבְתָּם לִי:

60. *Look at all their vengeance³⁰³, all their thoughts³⁰⁴ against me.*

61. שָׁמַעְתָּ חֲרָפָתָם יְהוָה כָּל-מַחֲשַׁבְתָּם עָלַי:

61. *Hear their calumny Adonai, all their thoughts against me.*

²⁹⁸ צוף - **vb.** flow, overflow “cause to overflow” (BDB)

²⁹⁹ גזר - **vb. Niph.** cut, divide, be cut off, separated, destroyed (BDB)

³⁰⁰ תחתי - **adj.** and **subst.** lower, lowest (places), “the lowest places of the earth” (BDB)

³⁰¹ עלם - **vb.** conceal, hide (BDB)

³⁰² קרב - **vb.** come near, approach (BDB)

³⁰³ נקמה - **n.f.** vengeance (BDB)

³⁰⁴ מחשבה - **n.f.** thought, device (BDB)

62. שִׁפְתֵי קָמִי וְהִגִּיוֹנָם עָלַי כָּל־הַיּוֹם:

62. *The words³⁰⁵ of my assailants and their satires³⁰⁶ are against me all day.*

63. שְׁבָתָם וְקִימָתָם הַבִּיטָה אֲנִי מִנְּגִינָתָם:

63. *See! When they sit and when they rise, I am their mocking song³⁰⁷.*

64. תָּשִׁיב לָהֶם גְּמוּל יְהוָה כַּמַּעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיהֶם:

64. *Repay them their dealing³⁰⁸ Adonai, according to their handiwork.*

65. תִּתֵּן לָהֶם מִגִּנַּת־לֵב תִּאָּלְתָּד לָהֶם:

65. *Give them a calloused heart³⁰⁹, your curse³¹⁰ will be on them.*

66. תִּרְדֹּף בָּאָרֶץ וְתִשְׁמִידֵם מִתַּחַת שָׁמַי יְהוָה:

66. *Pursue them in anger and destroy them under your heavens Adonai!*

Chapter Four

1. אֵיכָה יוֹעַם זָהָב יִשָּׁנָא הַפֶּתֶם הַטּוֹב תִּשְׁתַּפְּכֶנָּה אֲבָנֵי־קֹדֶשׁ בְּרֹאשׁ כָּל־חוֹצוֹת:

1. *How dim³¹¹ the gold has become, the pure gold changed. Holy stones are scattered at the head of every street.*

³⁰⁵ שפה - **n.f.** lip, speech, edge (BDB)

³⁰⁶ הגיון - **n.m.** resounding music, meditation, musing (BDB)

³⁰⁷ מנגינה - **n.f.** mocking, derisive song, "subject of their mocking song" (BDB)

³⁰⁸ גמול - **n.m.** dealing, recompense, benefit (BDB)

³⁰⁹ גנן - **vb.** cover; covering, a hard shell about the heart(BDB); "The meaning of מגמת לב is uncertain. Some interpretations emphasis the notion of גנן "cover." (Berlin)

³¹⁰ תאלה/אלה - **n.f.** curse (BDB)

³¹¹ עמם - **vb.** darken, dim, "how is the gold dimmed!" (BDB)

2. בְּנֵי צִיּוֹן הַיְקָרִים הַמְסֻלָּאִים בְּפֹז אֵיכָה נִחְשָׁבוּ לְנִבְלֵי־חֶרֶשׁ מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי יוֹצֵר:

2. *The precious³¹² children of Zion, worth more³¹³ than pure gold³¹⁴; how, they are regarded as earthen vessels³¹⁵, the work of a potter's³¹⁶ hands.*

3. גַּם־תַּנִּין חָלְצוּ שֵׁד הַיְנִיקוּ גּוּרֵיהֶן בַּת־עַמִּי לְאַכְזֹר כִּי עֲנִים בַּמִּדְבָּר:

3. *Even jackals³¹⁷ offer³¹⁸ their breast³¹⁹, they nurse³²⁰ their young³²¹. My dear people have become cruel³²² like the ostrich³²³ in the desert.*

³¹² יקר - **adj.** precious, rare, splendid (BDB)

³¹³ סלֵא - **vb.** weigh (BDB)

³¹⁴ פֶּז - **n.m.** refined, pure gold (BDB)

³¹⁵ חֶרֶשׁ - **n.m.** earthenware, earthen vessel, sherd, potsherd, “they are reckoned as earthen vessels” (BDB)

³¹⁶ יצר - **vb.** form, fashion, potter, creator (BDB)

³¹⁷ תֵּן - **n. m. et f.** jackal (BDB)

³¹⁸ חָלַץ - **vb.** draw off or out, withdraw, “draw out, present the breast of the animal giving suck” (BDB)

³¹⁹ שֵׁד - **n.m.** female breast (BDB)

³²⁰ יָנַק - **vb.** suck (BDB)

³²¹ גּוּר - **n.m.** whelp, young, young of jackals (BDB)

³²² אֶזְכָּר/כּוֹזֵר - **adj.** cruel, fierce, of poison (BDB)

³²³ יַעֲנָן - **n.m.** ostrich (i.e. voracious one) (BDB)

4. דִּבְק לְשׁוֹן יוֹנֵק אֶל־חִפּוֹ בְּצִמָּא עוֹלָלִים שְׁאֵלוּ לֶחֶם פֶּרֶשׁ אֵין לָהֶם:

4. *The tongue³²⁴ of the nursing infant³²⁵ cleaves³²⁶ to the roof³²⁷ of her mouth because of thirst³²⁸. Little children beg for bread. No one breaks³²⁹ bread for them.*

5. הָאֲכָלִים לְמַעַדְנִים נִשְׁמּוּ בַּחוּצוֹת הָאֲמָנִים עָלֵי תוֹלַע חִבְקוֹ אֲשַׁפְתּוֹת:

5. *Those who used to eat daintily³³⁰ are desolate (famished) in the streets. Those reared³³¹ in the lap of luxury³³², now embrace³³³ the dung-hill³³⁴.*

6. וַיִּגְדֹּל עוֹן בַּת־עַמִּי מִחֲטָאת סֹדֶם הִתְפּוּכָה כְּמוֹ־רִגַע וְלֹא־חָלוּ בָּהּ יָדַיִם:

6. *For the punishment of the daughters of my people is greater than the penalty of Sodom which was overthrown in a moment and no hands were raised toward her.*

³²⁴ לשון - **n.m.** tongue of men, in thirst, so as to produce dumbness (BDB)

³²⁵ ינק - see #306

³²⁶ דבק - **vb.** cling, cleave, keep close, “tongue to roof of mouth, in thirst” (BDB)

³²⁷ חך - **n.m.** palate, roof of mouth, gums, “for the parching of extreme thirst” (BDB)

³²⁸ צמא - **n.m.** thirst (BDB)

³²⁹ פרס - **vb.** break (BDB)

³³⁰ מעדן/עדן - **n.m.** dainty (food), delight; “those who ate daintily” (BDB)

³³¹ אמן - **vb.** confirm, support, “those brought up (in scarlet)” (BDB)

³³² תולע/תלע - **n.m.** worm, scarlet stuff, token of luxury (BDB)

³³³ חבק - **vb.** clasp, embrace (BDB)

³³⁴ אשפת - **n.m.** ash-heap, refuse-heap, dung-hill (BDB)

7. זכו נזיריה משלג צחו מחלב אדמו עצם מפנינים ספיר גזרתם:

7. *Her princes³³⁵ were brighter³³⁶ than snow³³⁷, more dazzling³³⁸ than milk, their bodies³³⁹ ruddier³⁴⁰ than coral³⁴¹, their beauty of form³⁴² was as sapphire³⁴³.*

8. חשך משחור תארם לא נפרו בחוצות צפד עורם על-עצמם יבש היה כעץ:

8. *Now their appearance³⁴⁴ has become darker³⁴⁵ than blackness³⁴⁶, they are unrecognizable³⁴⁷ in the streets. Their skin³⁴⁸ shriveled³⁴⁹ on their bones, withered, they have become dry³⁵⁰ as wood³⁵¹.*

³³⁵ נזיר - **n.m.** one consecrated, devoted, “her princes” (BDB)

³³⁶ זכך - **vb.** be bright, clean, pure, be bright, shining, fig. of splendor of nobles (BDB)

³³⁷ שלג - **n.m.** snow, “of fair skin” (BDB)

³³⁸ צחה - **vb.** be dazzling, “they are more dazzling (i.e. whiter) than milk (of effeminate skin). (BDB)

³³⁹ עצם - **n.f.** bone, substance, self (BDB)

³⁴⁰ אדם - **vb.** be red, “ruddy, of Nazirites (BDB)

³⁴¹ פנינים - **n. f. pl.** corals, red color (BDB)

³⁴² גזרה - **n.f.** cutting, separation, polishing or carving, i.e.. beauty of form, shape, “their polishing (or beauty of form) was as sapphire.” (BDB)

³⁴³ ספיר - **n.m.** sapphire, perh. also lapis lazuli (BDB)

³⁴⁴ תאר - **n.m.** outline, form (BDB)

³⁴⁵ חשך - **vb.** be, grow dark, “darker than blackness is their visage; of the earth (BDB)

³⁴⁶ שחור - **n.m.** blackness (BDB)

³⁴⁷ נכר - **vb. (not Qal)** regard, recognize, “they are not recognized” (BDB)

³⁴⁸ עור - **n.m.** skin (BDB)

³⁴⁹ צפד - **vb.** draw together, contract, “their skin shrivels upon their bones.” (BDB)

³⁵⁰ יבש - **vb.** be dry, dried up, withered (BDB)

³⁵¹ עץ - **n.m.** tree, trees, wood (BDB)

9. טובים היו חללי-חרב מחללי רעב שהם יזובו מדקרים מתגובת שדי:

9. *Better³⁵² off were the victims³⁵³ of the sword³⁵⁴ than the victims of hunger³⁵⁵, wasted away³⁵⁶, pierced³⁵⁷ by the lack of produce³⁵⁸ from the field.*

10. ידי נשים רחמניות בשלו ילדיהן היו לברות למו בשבר בת-עמי:

10. *The hands of compassionate women boiled³⁵⁹ their children, they became food for them, during the destruction of the daughter of my people.*

11. כלה יהיה את-תמתו שפף חרון אפו ויצת-אש בציון ותאכל יסודתיה:

11. *Adonai has accomplished³⁶⁰ his wrath, he has poured out furious anger and kindled a fire in Zion which has consumed its foundations³⁶¹.*

12. לא האמינו מלכי-ארץ וכל יושבי תבל כי יבא צר ואויב בשערי ירושלים:

12. *The kings of the earth would not have believed, nor any inhabitants of the world, that foe and enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem.*

13. חטאת נביאי עונות כהניה השפכים בקרבה דם צדיקים:

13. *On account of the sins of her prophets, the iniquities of her priests, who have shed in her midst the blood of the righteous.*

³⁵² טוב - **adj.** pleasant, agreeable, good (BDB)

³⁵³ חלל - **n.m.** pierced, fatally wounded (BDB)

³⁵⁴ חרב - **n.f.** sword (BDB)

³⁵⁵ רעב - **n.m.** famine, hunger (BDB)

³⁵⁶ זוב - **vb.** flow, gush 3. fig. flow away = pine away (from hunger) (BDB)

³⁵⁷ דקר - **vb.** pierce, pierce through, by hunger (BDB)

³⁵⁸ נוב/תנובה - **n.f.** fruit, produce (BDB)

³⁵⁹ בשל - **vb.** boil, seethe (intr.), grow ripe (BDB)

³⁶⁰ כלה - **vb.** be complete, at an end, finished, accomplished, spent, accomplish in thought (BDB)

³⁶¹ יסוד - **n.f.** foundation, base (BDB)

14. נָעוּ עוֹרִים בַּחוּצוֹת נִגְאָלוּ בַדָּם בְּלֹא יוֹכְלוּ יִגְעוּ בְּלִבֵּשֵׁיהֶם:

14. *They stumbled³⁶² blind through the streets, they were defiled with blood, and everyone shrank from touching their clothing.*

15. סוּרוּ טָמֵא קָרְאוּ לָמוֹ סוּרוּ סוּרוּ אֶל־תִּגְעוּ כִּי נָצוּ גַם־נָעוּ אָמְרוּ בְּגוֹיִם לֹא יוֹסִיפוּ לָגוּר:

15. *“Turn away³⁶³! Impure!” They called out at them. “Turn away, turn away! Don’t touch, for they fled and stumbled, they said, they shall no longer dwell among the nations.*

16. פָּנֵי יְהוָה חִלְקָם לֹא יוֹסִיף לְהַבִּיטָם פָּנֵי כֹהֲנִים לֹא נִשְׁאוּ זָקֵנִים לֹא תִנָּנוּ:

16. *The presence of Adonai has scattered them. No longer does he look after them. The priests were not shown respect, the elders were not favored.*

17. עוֹדִינָה תִכְלִינָה עֵינֵינוּ אֶל־עֲזָרָתָנוּ הֶבֶל בְּצַפִּיתָנוּ צָפִינוּ אֶל־גּוֹי לֹא יוֹשָׁע:

17. *Our eyes failed, looking, in vain, for help, and we watched and watched for a nation that could not save us.*

18. צָדוּ צִעְדֵינוּ מְלָכָת בְּרַחֲבֵתֵינוּ קָרַב קִצֵּינוּ מָלְאוּ יָמֵינוּ כִּי־בָא קִצֵּינוּ:

18. *They hunted³⁶⁴ our steps³⁶⁵ and prevented us from walking in our streets. Our end drew near. Our days were finished. The end had come.*

19. קָלִים הָיוּ רֹדְפֵינוּ מִנִּשְׁרֵי שָׁמַיִם עַל־הַהָרִים דָּלְקָנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר אָרְבוּ לָנוּ:

19. *Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the sky. They chased us on the mountains, they lay in wait for us in the wilderness.*

20. רוּחַ אִפֵּינוּ מִשִּׁיחַ יְהוָה נִלְכַּד בְּשַׁחֲתוֹתֵם אֲשֶׁר אָמְרָנוּ בְּצִלּוֹ נִחְיָה בְּגוֹיִם:

20. *The breath of our nostrils, Adonai’s anointed, was captured in their pits³⁶⁶, of whom we said, “under his shadow, we shall live among the nations.”*

³⁶² vb. quiver, wave, waver, tremble, totter, faint and uncertain (BDB) - נוע

³⁶³ vb. turn aside (BDB) - סור

³⁶⁴ vb. hunt (BDB) - צוד

³⁶⁵ n.m. step, pace (BDB) - צעד

³⁶⁶ f. a pit, plus שחיתות, from the root שחה, to sink down. (BDB) - שחית

21. שִׂישִׁי וְשִׂמְחִי בַּת־אֲדוֹם יוֹשֶׁבֶתִי בְּאֶרֶץ עוּז גַּם־עָלֶיךָ תַּעֲבֹר־כּוֹס תִּשְׁכָּרִי וְתִתְעָרִי:

21. *Rejoice and be glad, daughter of Edom, who dwells in the land of Uz. Upon you too the cup shall pass, you will get drunk and strip yourself bare*³⁶⁷.

22. תַּם־עוֹנֶךָ בַּת־צִיּוֹן לֹא יוֹסִיף לְהַגְלוֹתְךָ פֶּקֶד עוֹנֶךָ בַּת־אֲדוֹם גְּלָה עַל־חַטָּאתֶיךָ:

22. *Your punishment is complete, daughter of Zion. He will no longer keep you in exile. He will attend to your punishment, daughter of Edom. He will expose your sins.*

Chapter Five

1. זָכֹר יְהוָה מַה־הָיָה לָנוּ הַבֵּיט וּרְאֵה אֶת־תַּחֲרֻפָּתֵנוּ:

1. *Remember Adonai, what has become of us, take a good look at our degradation.*

2. נִחַלְתֵּנוּ נִגְהַפְכָה לְזָרִים בְּתֵינוּ לְנִכְרִים:

2. *Our inheritance*³⁶⁸ *has been turned over to outsiders*³⁶⁹, *our houses to aliens*³⁷⁰.

3. תוֹמִים הָייֵנוּ אֵין אָב אֲמֵתֵינוּ כְּאֶלְמָנוֹת:

3. *We have become orphans, fatherless; our mothers are widows.*

4. מִיָּמֵינוּ בְּכֶסֶף נִשְׁתֵּינוּ עֵצֵינוּ בְּמַחִיר יָבֵאוּ:

4. *We must pay for the water we drink, our firewood comes at a price*³⁷¹.

5. עַל צִוְאֲרֵנוּ נִרְדָּפְנוּ יִגְעֵנוּ לֹא הִנָּח־לָנוּ:

5. *Our pursuers are at our necks. We are exhausted, we are given no rest.*

6. מִצִּרִּים נָתַנוּ יָד אֲשׁוּר לְשַׁבַּע לָחֶם:

6. *To Egypt, we have extended our hand, and to Assyria, in order to get bread.*

³⁶⁷ ערה - **vb.** be naked, bare “thou shalt make thyself naked” (BDB)

³⁶⁸ נחלה - **n.f.** possession, property, inheritance (BDB)

³⁶⁹ זור - **vb.** be a stranger (BDB)

³⁷⁰ נכרי - **adj.** foreign, alien (BDB)

³⁷¹ מחיר - **n.m.** price, hire (BDB)

7. אֲבֹתֵינוּ חָטְאוּ אִינָם אַחֲנֵנוּ עֲוֹנֵיהֶם סָבְלָנוּ:

7. *Our fathers have sinned, they are no more, and we bear their iniquities.*

8. עֲבָדִים מְשֻׁלּוּ בָנוּ פֶּרֶק אֵין מִיָּדָם:

8. *Slaves rule over us, there is no one to deliver us from their land.*

9. בְּנַפְשֵׁנוּ נָבִיא לְחַמְנוּ מִפְּנֵי חֶרֶב הַמִּדְבָּר:

9. *With our lives in danger we get our bread, because of the sword of the wilderness.*

10. עוֹרֵנוּ כְּתַנּוּר נִכְמְרוּ מִפְּנֵי זִלְעָפוֹת רָעֵב:

10. *Our skin has become as hot as an oven, because of the burning heat of famine.*

11. נָשִׁים בָּצִיּוֹן עָנוּ בְּתִלְתִּי בְּעָרֵי יְהוּדָה:

11. *Women are being raped in Zion, virgins in the cities of Judah.*

12. שָׂרִים בְּיָדָם נִתְלוּ פְּנֵי זְקֵנִים לֹא נִהְדָּרוּ:

12. *Princes were hanged up by their hands, elders were not respected.*

13. בַּחֲוָרִים טָחוּן נָשְׂאוּ וּנְעָרִים כָּעֵץ כָּשְׁלוּ:

13. *Young men carried the millstone³⁷², and boys staggered³⁷³ under wood-loads.*

14. זְקֵנִים מְשַׁעֵר נִשְׁבְּתוּ בַּחֲוָרִים מִגִּינָתָם:

14. *The elders have ceased from the gate, the youths from their music.*

15. נִשְׁבֵּת מְשׁוּשׁ לִבָּנוּ נִהְפָּךְ לְאֵכָל מַחֲלָנוּ:

15. *The joy of our heart has ceased, our dancing³⁷⁴ has been turned into mourning.*

³⁷² טָחוּן - **n.m.** grinding mill, hand-mill (only found here) “the young men have borne the mill” (i.e. been compelled to bear it). (BDB)

³⁷³ כָּשַׁל - **vb.** stumble, stagger, totter (BDB)

³⁷⁴ מַחֲלוּ - **n.m.** dance (BDB)

16. גַּפְלָה עֲטָרַת רֹאשֵׁנוּ אֲוִי־נָא לָנוּ כִּי חָטֵאוּנוּ:

16. *The crown has fallen from our head; woe to us, for we have sinned.*

17. עַל־זֶה הָיָה דְּוָה לִבֵּנוּ עַל־אַלֶּה חֲשָׁכוּ עֵינֵינוּ:

17. *Because of this our heart has become sick, for these things our eyes have grown dim.*

18. עַל הַר־צִיּוֹן נִשְׁשָׁמִים שׁוֹעָלִים הֶלְכוּ־בָּו:

18. *For Mt. Zion, which lies desolate, jackals prowl over it.*

19. אַתָּה יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם תִּשָּׁב כְּסֵאֲךָ לְדֹר וָדֹר:

19. *You, Adonai, are enthroned forever, your throne endures throughout the generations.*

20. לָמָּה לִנְצַח תִּשְׁכַּחַנוּ תַעֲזֹבֵנוּ לְאַרְדֹּף יָמִים:

20. *Why do you forget forever, forsake³⁷⁵ us for so many days?*

21. הַנְּשִׁיבֵנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּנְשׁוּב חֲדָשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם:

21. *Turn us back to you Adonai, that we may be restored, and we will turn back.*

22. כִּי אַם־מָאֵס מְאַסְתָּנוּ קִצְפָּת עָלֵינוּ עַד־מְאֹד:

22. *For if you have rejected us completely, you have been exceedingly angry with us.*

³⁷⁵ vb. leave, forsake, loose (BDB) - עזב

Part Two

Lamentations - A Commentary
By Zachary Ira Zysman

איכה

The Sound of Ultimate Suffering

Chapter One

Chapter one begins by describing a portrait of suffering. Jerusalem sits alone like a desolate widow overcome with misery. The introductory chapter sets forth the entire book's format, tone and themes, including shame, mourning, suffering, anger, exile, degradation and prayer.³⁷⁶ Two voices are heard in this chapter, a sign that different voices, as well as theologies, will be heard throughout the book. The first voice heard is an anonymous poet speaking in the third-person, giving an exceptionally impressive poetic depiction of the desolation of the city of God.

Writing of Zion as one observing from outside what has happened to her, the poet's description of Jerusalem is heartwrenching: forsaken by loved ones (1:1), once grand, now desolate, alone, widowed (1:1), festivals unattended (1:4), her enemies victorious (1:5); destroyed and violated, the holy city sits in ruins, the people in anguish suffering the loss of home, loved ones, and God.

Jerusalem is in a state of utter wretchedness, unable to bear the pain of her punishment. She is a guilty victim dwelling in shame and mourning with no one to provide her comfort. Widowed and weeping she is left to the mercy of her enemies. In the first few verses alone the text offers images of Jerusalem as a lonely widow, degraded princess, whore, rape victim, betrayed lover, and abandoned wife. According to Berlin, "The personification of a city as a woman is a common image in prophetic literature...but

³⁷⁶ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 47.

nowhere is it developed more effectively than in the personification of Jerusalem in this chapter.³⁷⁷

When all of the city's allies betray her, *כָּל־רֵעֶיהָ בָּגְדוּ בָּהּ*, Jerusalem becomes like a woman betrayed by her lover. When Jerusalem laments the exile of her citizens and the fact that she is all alone, *יָשְׁבָהּ בָּדָד הָעִיר רַבְּתִי עִם הָיְתָה כְּאַלְמָנָה*, she has become like a mother mourning the loss of her children. Jerusalem experiences the religious violation and the people suffer.

Verse 1:8, for example, informs the reader, “Jerusalem sinned greatly; therefore she became like a menstruant.” Jerusalem's sin is the cause of her exile, and her exile is the cause of her shame.³⁷⁸ The word *בִּידָה*, seen in a slightly different form in 1:17, is particularly challenging. Having many possible meanings, here it is translated as “bleeding, menstruation” that consequently leads to “separation, abomination, and defilement”³⁷⁹ in the community. Jerusalem's shame is expressed in the sexual terms of nakedness and sexual exposure.

Seeing someone's nakedness was the height of indecency in the ancient world and so the use of the term *עֲרוּתָהּ*, “genitals,” has a devastating effect. Exposure of nakedness (*עֲרוּתָהּ*) and uncleanness (*בִּידָהּ*), associated with Leviticus 20:21, is meaningful on three levels: It is the expression of the utter contempt with which Zion is treated, exposure of one's body was to the ancient Israelites an almost immeasurable disgrace, and

³⁷⁷ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 47.

³⁷⁸ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 53.

³⁷⁹ Leonard S. Kravitz and Kerry M. Olitzky, *Eichah: A Modern Commentary on the Book of Lamentations*, (New York, URJ Press, 2008) 9.

“something exposed” is an idiom for something indecent (Deuteronomy 23:14).³⁸⁰ ערוּתָהּ is also used metaphorically in Isaiah 47:3 to disgrace Babylonia, and is applied to a entire country in Genesis 42:9, 12: “to see the nakedness of the land,” meaning to see its weakness.³⁸¹

With feelings of tremendous shame and guilt the people of Jerusalem are in mourning with no one to offer comfort or support (1:2). Incorporating various elements of the communal lament the people of Jerusalem request that God, רֵאָה (1:9, 1:11), “take a good look” at Judah’s condition and situation. Their political allies have betrayed them and have become foes (1:2). The world is literally crashing in, *Beyn HaMitzraim*, “In the narrow places” (1:3).

Because of stress and insomnia, acute anxiety has settled in and “she found no rest” (1:3). Gates are deserted (1:4), the city utterly disconsolate (1:4), enemies now the masters (1:5) and Adonai has afflicted her (1:5). The people are being punished for breaking their covenant with Adonai through “curses such as the loss of people (1:1 – 3), land (1:3, 18), and sanctuary (1:10).” The anonymous poet pleads for comfort in the face of the absence of a comforter.

After these dramatic cries about the destruction of the city, our second speaker, Zion herself, musters enough strength and courage to launch into an accusation against God (1:12-15). Berlin offers:

The scene of mourning is conveyed through two speaking voices, two perspectives, united in their understanding of the condition of the city and its

³⁸⁰ Hillers, *Lamentations*, 23 - 24.

³⁸¹ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 53.

people. The third-person voice of an observer describes Jerusalem (vv. 1 - 11), and then the first-person voice of Jerusalem herself speaks (vv. 12 - 22), reinforcing the picture in more graphic terms and with more immediacy.³⁸²

From this point on it is Zion who speaks, and the more detached voice is only occasionally heard (1:15, 17).³⁸³ The effect from this shift in perspective is to heighten the expression of anguish, and to intensify the participation in this anguish by the worshiper when the poem is used liturgically.³⁸⁴

At the center of the first poem (1:12) stands the belief that this suffering is part of *יום חרון אפו*, the day of God's flaming anger. The idea of this day is very widely attested in the Old Testament according to Hillers, beginning as early as Amos, nearly two hundred years before the present passage was written.³⁸⁵ Understanding that this day has arrived, Zion prays for and seeks revenge against her enemies (1:21). Until that happens there will be no rest.

Scholars disagree as to exactly what the Israelite conception - or conceptions - of the day of Adonai was at various times. The book of Lamentations is notable in that it several times (here and 2:1, 21, 22) refers to the day of Adonai's wrath as past. The awful events of the siege and fall were already a decisive outpouring of Adonai's wrath, a judgment day.³⁸⁶

³⁸² Berlin, *Lamentations*, 48.

³⁸³ Hillers, *Lamentations*, 16.

³⁸⁴ Hillers, *Lamentations*, 17.

³⁸⁵ Hillers, *Lamentations*, 26.

³⁸⁶ Hillers, *Lamentations*, 26 - 27.

The end of chapter one focuses on Jerusalem's enemies, the feeling of joy they have at Jerusalem's downfall and the revenge against them that Jerusalem hopes for.³⁸⁷ This will not be the last time the people pray for revenge. Several times, in fact, the people do this. This type of behavior, while not very nice, is however, one of those things humans do when they become enraged. You know you are not supposed to feel this way, but you do. This is an example of "uncensored language," what my teacher, Dr. Rachel Adler, describes as extremely human, unstructured and irrational. "Uncensored language" is the type of speech that is typical when you are in no shape to speak coherently.

The many voices we hear in *Eicha* perfectly encapsulates language in moments of chaos. During moments of tragedy our thoughts and lives are non-linear and unstructured. The way we understand and experience time changes. We may feel one thing while thinking the exact opposite.

Jewish texts, particularly *Eicha*, provide many examples that both encourage and allow for "uncensored language." The same language that invites the call for revenge is the same one that describes God as a devouring beast, lying in wait to attack and kill innocent women and children! It is the same language that dares to shame God by demanding to be noticed and to be seen and to see the destruction that God caused.

God is the witness whom the poem seeks to provoke. He who caused the destruction must now see how much misery it has wrought and must bring it to an end. Zion prays for revenge against her enemies (1:22). Punishment of others is her best hope

³⁸⁷ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 60.

for freedom. But God's only response is silence. Zion, in mourning for her beloved city, feeling a great deal of shame and guilt about her cause in the destruction, moves from sadness to anger in chapter two.

Chapter Two

As can be typical during times of distress, feelings of shame and despair can quickly turn into anger. This is true of the tone in chapter two with the acknowledgement and understanding that it was Adonai who destroyed Jerusalem and brought upon its suffering. Readers are reminded that as a result of God's anger toward Israel, Israel's status has been lowered considerably and she no longer has a special relationship with God.³⁸⁸ Berlin notes, "God is angry with Israel, and, from the tone in which that anger is described, we sense that the poet is angry with God." God has become Judah's enemy and the people are not happy about it.

The day of Adonai's anger, **בְּיוֹם אַפּוֹ** has arrived, a day unleashed upon Israel because they have sinned repeatedly, and have ignored the advice of their prophets. Divided into three parts (vv. 1-10: the description of Jerusalem in the third person, vv. 11-19: the poet's first person speech as he reacts to what he sees and vv. 20-22: Zion's speech to God), chapter two intensifies its emotional impact as the poet moves from objective observer to subjective sufferer.³⁸⁹

Time after time, God unleashes his wrath onto the precious city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants: 2:1, 2:2, 2:6. Chapter two has less of the personification of Zion. Only at

³⁸⁸ Leonard S. Kravitz and Kerry M. Olitzky, *Eichah: A Modern Commentary on the Book of Lamentations*, 34.

³⁸⁹ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 67.

the very end of the chapter does she speak for herself, “for these things do I weep” (2:16). These miseries are described in connection with national sins and acts of God conveying the message that Adonai destroyed Zion. The people, therefore, cry out to Adonai in anguish for help.

The world has surely been turned upside down. Jerusalem is on fire. Children are dying of hunger, begging their mothers for food (2:12). Mothers, in turn eat their babies (2:20). The people’s hearts scream out to God! And yet again, there is no comfort. Jerusalem’s enemies have won, her gates have sunk into the ground (2:9) and her leaders are in exile (2:9). Enemies jeer, hissing and gnashing their teeth, crying, “This is the day we have waited for!” (2:16).

Depicted as a mighty warrior, Adonai ravishes both the buildings and people of Zion, and is indifferent to Israel’s agony. In verse three we read:

גָּדַע בַּחֲרִי־אֵף כָּל קֶרֶן יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵשִׁיב אַחֲוֹר יְמִינוֹ מִפְּנֵי אוֹיֵב וַיִּבְעֶר בִּיעֶקֶב כָּאֵשׁ לְהִבָּה
אַכְלָה סָבִיב:

He mutilated in furious anger every horn of Israel. He has withdrawn his right hand in the face of the enemy and he burns Jacob as a flaming fire consuming all around.

The word קֶרֶן means horn. Borrowed from the animal kingdom, it is a symbol of strength and glory (see, Jeremiah 48:25, Ps 75:11, I Sam 2:1, Ps 112:9) and is used in reference to Davidic kingship in Ps 89:25 and 132:17.³⁹⁰ Pitiless in his anger, God has removed all power from Jerusalem, leaving her helpless from attack, hunger and destruction. In verse four Adonai strikes like an enemy:

³⁹⁰ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 68.

דָּרַךְ קִשְׁתּוֹ כְּאֹיֵב נָצַב יְמִינוֹ כְּצֹר וַיִּהְרֹג כָּל מִחְמַדֵּי־עֵינַי בְּאַהֲלֵי בֵּת־צִיּוֹן שָׁפַךְ כְּאֵשׁ חֲמָתוֹ

He bent his bow like an enemy, he set his right hand like a foe, and killed all that is precious to my eye. The fury of his anger poured (down) like fire on the tent of the daughters of Zion!

God is no longer creator but rather destroyer, consuming, swallowing, devouring and burning everything in sight. Things are exactly the opposite of what is supposed to happen. Just as language can be unmade by chaos and destruction,³⁹¹ here, Berlin suggests, “The city is intentionally and methodically being unbuilt...it is as if God is erasing Jerusalem from the map.”³⁹² Gone is the temple, the seat of government, and the physical structures of the city; once beautiful, now in a heap of ruins.

The anger of the first part of the chapter fades into sorrow and regret in the second part (vv 11 - 19). Verse ten portrays the mourning of the people and serves as a transition to the poet’s personal grief:³⁹³

יָשְׁבוּ לָאָרֶץ יְדָמוּ זָקְנֵי בֵּת־צִיּוֹן הִעֲלּוּ עֹפֹר עַל־רִאשָׁם חָגְרוּ שָׁקִים הוֹרִידוּ לָאָרֶץ
רִאשָׁן בְּתוֹלֵת יְרוּשָׁלָּם:

The Elders of Zion sat on the ground, stupefied and astounded. They threw dust on their heads, girded themselves in sackcloth; the virgins of Jerusalem bowed their heads down to the ground.

In the subsequent verses the poet feels inadequate to comfort the people’s understandably deep pain. Yet he attempts to do so, according to Garrett and House, by noting their

³⁹¹ Scarry, *The Body In Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, 4.

³⁹² Berlin, *Lamentations*, 67.

³⁹³ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 72.

prophets' failures, their political friends' treachery, and their enemies' boasting. The poet firmly believes Adonai will respond favorably.³⁹⁴

Is this comfort, as Garrett and House suggest? Or is it simply articulating all the catastrophes that brought about the people's woe? Dr. Adler suggests, "It is the making sense of things that people do when trying to narrate to themselves exactly how this disaster came about. They do it repeatedly because it is so incredible to them." How can you make sense out of catastrophe? One of the most heart-wrenching aspects of destruction, war, or cancer is the cruel death of children, which here occurs in public, in the city squares, and not privately at home, out of sight.³⁹⁵

לְאִמָּתָם יֹאמְרוּ אִיהֶם דָּגוּ וַיִּינּוּ בְּהִתְעַטְּפָם בְּחָלָל בְּרַחֲבוֹת עִיר בְּהִשְׁתַּפֵּף נַפְשָׁם אֶל־חֵיק
אִמָּתָם:

They say to their mothers, "Where is grain and wine?" As they collapse as if they have been pierced in the streets of the city, because their lives have been turned upside down, dying into their mothers' bosoms.

Chapter two ends in the same way as chapter one, with Zion herself giving a final speech to Adonai. This supplication is meant to arouse God's sympathy by calling attention to the misery and destruction of the people, and the best way to accomplish this is through the mention of starving children. Zion has witnessed the people, terrified, famished to the point of cannibalism, homeless and without protection lift their hands to the sky to beg for forgiveness and mercy. The poet adjures Zion to cry out:

קוּמִי רִנִּי בַלֵּיל לְרֹאשׁ אֲשֶׁמְרוֹת שְׁפָכִי כַמִּים לִבֶּךָ נִכַּח פָּנַי אֲדֹנָי שְׂאִי אֵלָיו כַּפֶּיךָ עַל־נַפְשׁ
עוֹלָלֶיךָ הֶעָטוּפִים בְּרָעַב בְּרֹאשׁ כָּל־חֻצוֹת

³⁹⁴ Garrett and House, *Word Biblical commentary: Song of Songs/Lamentations*, 387.

³⁹⁵ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 72.

Arise, cry out in the night at the beginning of the watches, pour out you heart like water in the presence of Adonai! Lift up your hands to Him For the life of your infants, who faint for hunger at every street corner. (2:19)

Zion accuses, rather than implores:

תִּקְרָא כִּיּוֹם מוֹעֵד מִגּוּרֵי מִסָּבִיב וְלֹא הָיָה בְּיוֹם אֶף-יְהוָה פָּלִיט וְשָׂרִיד אֲשֶׁר-טִפַּחְתִּי וְרַבִּיתִי אִיבִי
כָּלָם

You summoned, as on a festival, my neighbors from roundabout. On the day of the wrath of the Lord, none survived or escaped; those whom I bore and reared my foe has consumed. (2:22)

Judah is methodically and mercilessly destroyed by God, and lets the enemy rejoice over the destruction. God even invites the attackers to witness the destruction and participate in it.³⁹⁶ The people are once again left suffering and with no one to comfort them.

Chapter Three

There are characteristics about this chapter that set it apart from the others in both form and content, particularly the poetic form. A triple acrostic, with three short lines assigned to each letter of the alphabet, gives a more rapid and insistent beat to the poem. Additionally, this chapter does not begin with the word *Eicha*, as chapters one, two and four do.

Furthermore, the speaker in chapter three is not Jerusalem/Zion or her people, rather the voice is of a lone male, אֲנִי הַגֵּבֶר, speaking in the first person, about what he has seen and felt and what sense he can make of it, “I am the man who has known affliction under the rod of His wrath” (3:1). Who is this man? How is this man, and the

³⁹⁶ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 76.

chapter, connected to the other chapters in the book? This is complicated by the presence of other voices within this chapter; “we” and “us,” for example, is used in verses 40-47.

For Garrett and House, who provide a Christian interpretation, the fact that the speaker is a lone male makes him the most authoritative speaker in the book of Lamentations. Some, according to Berlin, see him as the same poet who spoke in the earlier chapters (Provan), while others take him to be an anonymous sufferer, perhaps a surviving soldier (Lanahan and Owens), a defeated strongman (K. O’Connor, in NIB), a collective voice of the people (Albrektson, Gordis), a prominent resident of Jerusalem (Renkema), or Everyman (Hillers).³⁹⁷ Few nowadays identify the lone male with a historical individual, like Jeremiah, Jehoiachin, or Zedekiah.³⁹⁸

The change in poetic form in chapter three gives a more rapid and insistent beat to the poem. Many ideas and images are entangled together acting as a counterweight to the formal structuring of the acrostic.³⁹⁹ Lacking a clear progression of ideas, the voices alternate between feelings of hope and despair. Similar to other chapters the issues set forth are not resolved.

Chapter three, more than all the others in the book, combines descriptions of suffering with theological inquiry into that suffering⁴⁰⁰ and manages to convey all of this information in very human terms and emotions. In verses 1-21, the speaker describes

³⁹⁷ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 84.

³⁹⁸ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 84.

³⁹⁹ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 85.

⁴⁰⁰ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 86

God as a predatory beast and a torturer, “best understood,” according to Berlin, “as a poetic representation of the forced march into exile.”⁴⁰¹

With deeply personal language and gruesomely vivid descriptions, *the man*, angrily and very personally speaks to God in the first eleven verses. He describes decomposing bodies wasting away, bodies like rags, and the tearing of flesh off of skin:

כָּלָה בְּשָׂרִי וְעוֹרִי נִשְׁבַּר עֲצָמוֹתַי

He has caused my flesh and skin to become pulverized and has smashed my bones. (3:4)

The body has become tattered, pulverized and crushed! No longer capable of living a meaningful life amidst the horror and reality of their lives, the people have come to feel like a corpse, like the living dead, dwelling in darkness as those who have been dead for years and years.

בְּמַחְשָׁפִים הוֹשִׁיבָנִי כַּמֵּתִי עוֹלָם

He made me dwell in darkness like those who have been dead for years and years. (3:6)

What must this have felt like for the ancient person, for whom dead bodies represented ritual impurity, contagion and potential disease? You were meant to run away from a dead body, and yet, this is the very condition the people find themselves in, as if they were living corpses themselves. A nightmare scenario for the people of Jerusalem with a big time yuck factor!

Chapter three puts forth some of the clearest expressions of abusive language towards God in our tradition. Compared to a lurking bear and a lion in hiding, God is

⁴⁰¹ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 86.

equated with the most dangerous predatory animals. The imagery of a “mother bear,” that appears elsewhere in the Bible, is the most dangerous a bear can be, particularly when her baby is threatened. A lion in hiding is a terrifying image. With the strength and ferociousness of both of these animals, God mangles and rips the people to shreds. God is unquestionably the enemy.

Still, however, the supreme power in the world, despite the harm caused, God remains the only source of help for the poet.⁴⁰² Because of this there are moments of hopefulness. Beginning in verse 3:21 the speaker declares:

זאת אָשִׁיב אֶל־לִבִּי עַל־כֵּן אוֹחִל

This I take into consideration therefore I wait. (3:21)

The word אוֹחֵל comes from יָחַל meaning to wait or hope for. We read of a similar longing in Psalms 130:5 - 6:

קוֹיֹתִי יְהוָה קוֹתֶה נַפְשִׁי וְלִדְבָרוֹ הוֹחֵלָתִי
נַפְשִׁי לְאֲדֹנָי מִשְׁמָרִים לְבֹקֶר שְׁמָרִים לְבֹקֶר

I look to Adonai; I look to him; I await His word. I am more eager for Adonai than watchmen for the morning, watchmen for the morning.

Not coincidentally, salvation arrives in the morning, both in the book of Psalms and in Lamentations; for the morning has long been associated as a time of hope and renewal. This concept is no different in Judaism. With the dawn of each new day, thankfully, there is hope and the possibility for new and great things to happen, despite the fact that you may have sinned against and disobeyed God. With every new day there is a renewed chance for life, as we read:

⁴⁰² Berlin, *Lamentations*, 88.

חֲסִדֵי יְהוָה כִּי לֹא־תִמְנֹו כִּי לֹא־כָלוּ רַחֲמָיו
חֲדָשִׁים לַבִּקְרִים רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתְךָ

Surely Adonai's kindness will not end for us; indeed his compassion is not used up. They are renewed every morning; great is your faith and truth! (3:22-23)

At this point, the speaker praises God directly by declaring רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתְךָ, “great is your faithfulness.”

In verses 28-29 there is a harsh transition from a feeling of hope to that of submission, as if the people were adopting a masochistic stance and telling themselves to “just suck it up!” The man tells the people:

טוֹב לְגֶבֶר כִּי־יֵשֶׂא עַל בְּנֻעָרָיו:
יֵשֵׁב בְּדָד וַיִּדָּם כִּי נָטַל עָלָיו:
יִתֵּן בְּעַפְרָ פִּיהוּ אוֹלֵי יֵשׁ תִּקְוָה

*It is good for a man to carry the yoke in his youth.
Let him sit alone in silence when it is life upon him.
Let him put his mouth into the dust, perhaps there is hope.*

While many theologies exist in the book of Lamentations, here it seems to be saying, “I’m going to shut up and be a good slave. Then maybe master will let up on the abuse.” This is not “being good” but rather articulating the bitter resignation of the abused survivor.

Another transition occurs in verses 40-44. According to Berlin this is the theological and poetic turning point of the chapter. These verses form a transition to a new type of discourse, in which the speaker is “we” instead of “I” and in which God is addressed directly as “you” instead of being spoke about as “he.” Here, again, the genre/language switches from wisdom discourse to lament or penitential psalm. We read:

נִחַפְשָׁה דְרָכֵינוּ וְנִחַקְרָה וְנִשׁוּבָה עַד־יְהוָה

Let us search and probe our ways and return to Adonai! (3:40)

This poem is a national lament, not an intellectual exercise. The tone of the poem here transitions back to anger and despair; and the language of wisdom is overwhelmed by the language of lament. Berlin says, “Despite the valiant attempt at theodicy, reason cannot conquer all.”⁴⁰³ If, earlier, the poet argued that the people must find their error and repent, now he understands that repentance does not automatically lead to forgiveness.⁴⁰⁴

Then, seemingly out of nowhere, comes yet another transition. Without any grammatical conjunction comes verse 42:

נִחַנּוּ פְּשָׁעֵנוּ וּמִרְיָנוּ אֶתָּה לֹא סָלַחְתָּ

We have transgressed and rebelled. You have not forgiven.

Our poet now seems to say that there is no direct relationship between repentance and forgiveness, contradicting himself and what Jeremiah says in 18:5-12.⁴⁰⁵ Berlin acknowledges that “this may be the most disturbing idea in the chapter, and in the entire book.” *The man* accuses God of ignoring the pain and prayers of Jerusalem and her people. The נִגְזַר accuses God of having hardened his heart, of deliberately covering himself (סָכַתָּה) in anger and killing without mercy (3:43), and hiding in a cloud so that the prayers of the people can not pass through to him (3:44).

Berlin notes, “In a masterfully ironic allusion, the poet reinterprets a major religious principle about divine immanence” (Berlin, 96). The root סָכַכּ (to cover, overshadow, veil), usually has the positive connotation of “to protect from danger,” in

⁴⁰³ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 95

⁴⁰⁴ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 95

⁴⁰⁵ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 96

connection with the protecting wings of the cherubs and the covering of the ark (Exodus 25:20, 37:9, I Kings 8:7, I Chronicles 28:18).⁴⁰⁶ The cloud pillar in the wilderness leads the people to safety and is described as a protective cover in Psalm 105:39:

פָּרַשׁ עָנָן לְמִסְכָּה וְאֵשׁ לְהָאִיר לַיְלָה

He spread a cloud for a cover, and fire to light up the night.

The idea of “covering” and “clouds” in *Eicha*, however, have the opposite connotation seen elsewhere in the OT. Rather than protecting the people, God pursues and kills them. Instead of being drawn near, a cloud “protects” God from the people, leaving them alone, without comfort or safety. Berlin states:

This is a devastating negation of a fundamental religious concept inscribed in traditional sources. It is a fierce indictment of God. Nowhere in Lamentations, and perhaps in the entire Bible, is God’s refusal to be present more strongly expressed. This is the climax of the poem’s theodicy, for at this point the poet reaches a theological impasse.⁴⁰⁷

This is only one of the many reasons why the book of Lamentations is profoundly comforting for so many people. It allows people to feel and express a “fierce indictment towards God” during moments of crisis.

In verses 48-66 the speaker now prays earnestly for and with the people. While doing so he describes his personal grief at Jerusalem’s predicament (vv 48-51), declares what the enemy has done (vv52-54), confesses how Adonai has helped him in the past (vv55-58), and confidently asks God to see and punish the nation’s enemies (vv 59-66).⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁶ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 96

⁴⁰⁷ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 96

⁴⁰⁸ Garrett and House, *Word Biblical commentary: Song of Songs/Lamentations*, 424

Quite often it is the case that only when people hit rock bottom that they can begin to see the light again. This is the case with this chapters speaker, the lone man. Kathleen M. O'Connor, observes, "Occupying the center of five chapters, chapter three contains the only words of explicit hope in the book."⁴⁰⁹ As the eye of the storm, this poem brings with it the sudden appearance of hope, surrounded by poems of desolation and doubt. This begs the question, "How is the hope of (this chapter) to be measured against the bleak poetic terrain around it? What is the nature of this hope, uttered as it is by someone who seems to be moving in and out of despair?"

Chapter Four

Different in content from that of earlier chapters, this one continues *Eicha's* emphasis on detailing the people's excruciating pain and documents the horrors and physical changes wrought by the starvation of the siege: throats dry from thirst (4:4), faces blackened from warfare (4:8), eyes blinded. As the chapter progresses, the reader relives, step by step, the siege and its accompanying suffering. Although, as Berlin notes:

...because the images are the the most part conveyed by a third-person observer, there is an odd sense of detachment, amplified by the contrast between what was before and what is now, and the contrast between a normal society and the abnormal conditions that characterize the siege.⁴¹⁰

As a reader, one cannot help but feel like a voyeur, a first-person observer watching in horror as the sequence of events unfold.

The two speakers, an unidentified narrator and the people of Zion, appear exhausted and hopeless. Berlin asserts that the "main theme of this chapter is

⁴⁰⁹ O'Connor, *Lamentations & The Tears of the World*, 44

⁴¹⁰ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 103.

degradation: everything beautiful has been sullied, things of priceless value are treated as if worthless.”⁴¹¹ It is almost if the verses in this poem, spoken by the unnamed narrator, are uttered in a monotone, as if the tragedy has left him stunned and depleted.

Giving voice to pain remains the heart of the chapter, focusing on the community and its experience of the siege. The text returns to statements about Jerusalem’s losses, her children’s agony, and how Adonai has punished a sinful people. A once strong and powerful people are now described in this way:

חֲשֵׁךְ מִשְׁחֹר תֵּאָרֶם לֹא נִכְרוּ בַּחוּצוֹת צָפַד עוֹרֶם עַל־עֲצָמָם יָבֵשׁ הָיָה כָּעֵץ

Now their appearance has become darker than blackness, they are unrecognizable outside in the streets. Their skin shriveled on their bones, withered, they have become dry as wood. (4:8)

Composed of four speeches the text moves from description of woe to pronouncement of the end of divine punishment. Similar in form and content to chapters one and two, chapter four begins, “*Eicha*,” describing Jerusalem’s woes in great detail utilizing first and third-person points of view. The acrostic form, however, differs here from chapter one and two, consisting of two-line verses in which the first word of each verse begins with the succeeding letter of the alphabet.

The first two verses serve as a general introduction to the main theme of the chapter: the mistreatment of the people of Jerusalem. Human beings, far more precious than fine gold, have become “throwaway” objects. “The message is clear,” Berlin states, “the people have been degraded into the cheapest and least permanent material and have

⁴¹¹ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 102

no control over what becomes of them.”⁴¹² Dead bodies lie at every street corner (4:1) and the children of Zion are discarded like broken pots, tossed out and left to die (4:2).

The following verses continue to focus on community complaint and the sustained suffering of Jerusalem’s inhabitants. Reminiscent of the reversal we read about in chapter one, here we read about those reared in royalty who are now living in trash heaps:

הָאֲכָלִים לְמַעַדְנִים נִשְׁמָו בַּחוּצוֹת הָאֲמָנִים עָלֵי תוֹלַע חִבְקוֹ אֲשַׁפְתּוֹת

Those who used to eat daintily are famished in the streets. Those reared in the lap of luxury, they now embrace the dung-hill. (4:5)

The conditions have become so horrible and frightening that those who died by the sword fared better than the survivors:

טוֹבִים הָיוּ חַלְלֵי־חֶרֶב מִחַלְלֵי רָעֵב שֶׁהֵם יָזוּבוּ מִדִּקְרִים מִתְנוּבָת שָׂדֵי

Better off were the victims of the sword than the victims of hunger, wasted away, stabbed by the lack of produce from the field. (4:9)

In verses 11-16, the tone changes, becoming more theological as well as more detached and impersonal. Description takes place of overt empathy. Significantly, God is mentioned for the first time in verse eleven, and to the utter horror and shock of the people allows the enemy to enter God’s sanctuary. The prophets and religious leaders are held responsible. The people are therefore exiled and God no longer shows concern for them.⁴¹³

⁴¹² Berlin, *Lamentations*, 105.

⁴¹³ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 109

In verses 17-20, the discourse shifts to first-person plural as the surviving community describes the final stages of Jerusalem's fall.⁴¹⁴ The speaker identifies fully with the suffering nation. Using the first person plural suffix **נַּ**, "us," over and over again, the speaker indicates who suffers under God's wrath, recounting the siege and fall of Jerusalem in sequential detail. The people are stalked, caught and slaughtered like trapped animals, while the enemy soar like eagles over mountains and the wilderness (4:19). The people, terrified and alone, are hunted and killed while their enemies and God watch like spectators at a sporting event.

The concluding verses have two significant elements: it emphasizes the joy that the enemy has felt over Jerusalem's demise while at the same time stresses their certain destruction. As the chapter ends, the people have the promise of a better future than when it started for the completion of their divine judgement has been announced:

תַּם-עֲוֹנֶיךָ בַּת-צִיּוֹן לֹא יוֹסִיף לְהַגְלוֹתְךָ פֶּקֶד עֲוֹנֶיךָ בֶּת-אֲדוֹם גָּלָה עַל-חַטֹּאתֶיךָ:

Your punishment is complete, daughter of Zion. He will no longer keep you in exile. He will attend to your punishment, daughter of Edom. He will expose your sins.

The people, feeling enormous relief because of God's decision to cease hostility against them, now turn their hearts once again towards prayer and revenge.

Chapter Five

Chapter five proves that there are no happy endings when it comes to lament literature. Although, as in chapter three, the first word is not *eicha*. The introductory imperative, *zachor*, meaning "remember," conveys the people's desperate plea to not be

⁴¹⁴ Berlin, *Lamentation*, 112

forsaken. “Take a good look at what we have gone through!” the people seem to shout. “Take notice of our abject state. See the disintegration of our personal and communal lives. Restore us to our previous condition!”

Chapter five stands apart from the rest of *Lamentations*, especially with respect to formal features. The shortest of the five chapters, it is not an acrostic, although, it does consist of twenty-two one-line verses, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In ancient Israel, these types of laments were evidently composed and used in times of great national distress, when the whole nation appealed for help against its enemies. Commonly cited examples of the genre in the psalms are Psalms 44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83 and 89.⁴¹⁵

Framed, hauntingly, by a call to God, chapter five begins with an opening plea with the people praying for God to take notice of them (5:1) and ends with them feeling rejected and ignored (5:20, 22). It is striking that the speakers refer to themselves and the people in first-person plural or second-person plural forms. At this point the people pray together. Unlike the previous chapters, no alternating voices appear in this chapter. Community, it seems, replaces all the speakers from the previous four chapters and acts as a united voice.

The body of the chapter (vv. 2-18) reads as a portrait of occupation and the deprivation, humiliation, and frustration that accompany it.⁴¹⁶ It tells of the nation’s distress. It tells about the breakdown of the social, economic, political, and religious

⁴¹⁵ Hillers, *Lamentations*, 102

⁴¹⁶ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 116

structures of Judah and expresses the woe that the people have endured and continue to endure. They stress economic impoverishment on a personal level, as it affected individuals and their families.⁴¹⁷ Inherited land was taken by those outside the line of inheritance:

נִחַלְתָּנוּ גִּהְפָּכָה לְזָרִים בְּתֵינוּ לְנֹכְרִים:

Our inheritance has been turned over to outsiders, our houses to aliens. (5:2)

Families were bereft of the head of the household becoming orphans and fatherless; the mothers widows:

יְתֹמִים הָיִינוּ אֵין אָב אֲמָתֵינוּ כְּאַלְמָנוֹת:

We have become orphans, fatherless; our mothers are widows. (5:3)

Orphans and widows were recognized in the ancient Near East as the classes most defenseless against aggression.⁴¹⁸

Verses 11-14 emphasize social humiliation and abuse. The text refers to the lack of law and order in the land (5:9), continued famine (5:10), the rape of the women of Zion (5:11), the hanging of princes (5:12) elders disrespected (5:12), youth turned into slaves (5:13) and the men absent from the city gate and from music (5:14). This was a horrible and terrifying time.

Verses 15-18 detail the loss of the king and the temple, the climax of the list of losses in the chapter, signaling the political and religious demise of the country and the dissolution of the Davidic covenant.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁷ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 116

⁴¹⁸ Hillers, *Lamentations*, 103.

⁴¹⁹ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 116

In many ways this chapter is the simplest to explain, unfolding with a fairly straightforward community lament beginning with an opening address (5:1), followed by a description of woes (5:2-18), and ending with a plea for renewal of the covenant relationship⁴²⁰ (5:19-22). Hillers notes, “As the poet writes, however, there is not yet any sign of favorable action by God, and the poem and book end, not in despair, yet very soberly.”⁴²¹ All the people can do, as has been true throughout the book, is to confess their sins, express their pain, and urgently ask God to comfort them and return them to glory. But they get no response, and receive no comfort.

Verse 22 has sparked a great deal of discussion. The people have asked God to restore them to their previous selves, similar to lines found in Jeremiah 31:18, a passage that does lead to the promise of a new covenant and other long-term blessings in Jeremiah 31:31-40,⁴²² but not here. There is no response. The people feel rejected.

In fact, because the rabbis forbade concluding any public reading of scripture on a note of despair, it is the Jewish custom at any public reading of *Lamentations* to repeat the last positive verse (5:21). Similar repetitions of the penultimate verse apply to the final chapters of Isaiah, Malachi, and Ecclesiastes.⁴²³ This, according to Dr. Adler, “acknowledges that the book ends on despair and demonstrates a kind of rabbinic chutzpah in re-ordering divine revelation to say something more hopeful than what it said.”

⁴²⁰ Garrett and House, *Word Biblical commentary: Song of Songs/Lamentations*, 472

⁴²¹ Hillers, *Lamentations*, 106

⁴²² Garrett and House, *Word Biblical commentary: Song of Songs/Lamentations*, 470

⁴²³ Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible* (New York; Oxford University Press, 2004)1602.

As the book ends, the people have not yet heard from Adonai, however they have done what they must. Pain has been expressed and the people have recognized and taken responsibility for their part in their sufferings. The timing for the people's restoration remains solely on God.

Conclusion

It was my hope, during the the course of my work on this capstone project to lean in to lament literature. As I was deciding what topic I wanted to explore for my thesis, I would tell people that I was interested in looking at the book of Lamentations. Almost universally people would shudder and look at me with raised eyebrows and a curious look, as if to say, "Why on earth would you want to spend so much time on such a depressing topic?" After enough people reacted this way it became obvious that I should in fact "lean in" to and explore this topic. In the end this proved to be easier than expected, however, the words and stories of *Eicha* did in fact hit me with a wallop of emotion.

Lamenting is something I became accustomed to doing while I was in rabbinical school. In the third year of my program my father died suddenly of a massive heart attack. I found him lying face down on the floor of his apartment building. My Bubbie, the matriarch of our family, died a couple of years later at the age of 96. Additionally, we buried several uncles and close family friends. With every death I became fascinated with people's reactions and responses to death, what brought them comfort and what seemed to turn them off.

Ritual and prayer, I found, were most comforting for people dealing with these issues, even for those who did not think of themselves as traditional Jews. No one, I have found (even clergy), knows what to say during times like these. Having a prayer or psalm that have been around for generations to recite or read help people feel connected to something larger than themselves. I believe holding on to and participating in ritual and prayer makes people feel connected to the divine.

The book of Lamentations offers this opportunity by expressing, in explicit detail, the pain and horror that comes with death, dying, and feeling as if God has abandoned you. *Eicha's* poetry is lyrical, moving and exquisitely beautiful. Laments inherently have a musicality and richness to them; therefore, the best way to experience them is to hear them aloud. They were created for performance. The great singer-songwriter Stevie Wonder wrote:

Music is a world within itself, with a language we all understand, with an equal opportunity for all to sing, dance and clap their hands...they can feel it all over.
(Sir Duke)⁴²⁴

There is something about poetry, music, and lament literature that transcends time, class, economic status, education, religion, gender and so on. Music is a divine language that speaks directly to the heart; something *Eicha* has been doing for generations.

As part of my work for this thesis Dr. Adler informed me that I would be learning *Eicha* trope in order to be able to chant the book on *Tisha B'Av*. "The 9th Av" is a day of mourning in the Jewish calendar. It is a complete fast day when we remember the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem. Additionally, the Jews were

⁴²⁴ Stevie Wonder, *Songs in the Key of Life* (Album), 1976

expelled from Spain on *Tisha B'Av* in 1492. This day has become associated as a focal point of bitter memories for the Jewish people.

The melody of *Eicha* is the most beautiful of all of the trope musical systems applied to our sacred texts. Its mournful melody yearns to find hope amid destruction, as we sing and pray for God to comfort us and renew our days. Even without understanding any of the words, the trope tells a story, moving from agony to hope.

One of the many privileges I had while working on this project were the times when Dr. Adler and I worked on *leining Eicha*. It was during these moments that we would stop and appreciate a sudden change in the trope, or shudder together at a particular gruesome scene. Dr. Adler would then tell stories, this one inspired by a certain *tractate* that was somehow related to our verse, or a memory shared about writing an article or giving a keynote speech. This was music to my ears and somehow made perfect sense in the context of what we were doing. Music has a way of speaking and communicating when language has been unmade and communication has broken down.

Elaine Scarry describes pain as unmaking language and even the universe, which is constructed through language.⁴²⁵ This is the reason why describing pain can be nearly impossible. Pain is implicitly personal and is experienced differently by everyone. There is essentially no common language for pain. Some cry out in pain, others groan in agony, while others scream out in utter desperation. Laments use language and also non-language to allow pain to be expressed. The biblical writers understood this. Adele Berlin offers:

⁴²⁵ in the introduction to *The Body In Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*.

The world order of Lamentations had been disrupted; no order exists any longer in the real world. But as if to counteract this chaos, the poet has constructed his own linguistic order that he marks out graphically for us by the orderly progression of the letter of the alphabet.⁴²⁶

That is, the poet constructs an arbitrary, artificial frame (the alphabet) to pack all the disorder into.

Laments are vital because they are non-linear and disorganized. Similarly, death can be a shock to the system, and not only for the deceased. Most anyone who has seen or been around a freshly dead body, particularly a relative or friend, knows that being close to one is a visceral experience. The air feels and smells different. The dead body is cold, rigid and lifeless; the skin a dark purple-bluish hue. Chaos, as well, brings destruction, panic and shock. Neither death nor chaos arrive announced and when they do life becomes disorganized. One minute life is normal and the next it is upside down. This change can happen in a flash; a swift reversal of fortune that alters everything as a result of the chaos brought into your life.

To cry out to God (the universe, the one, something bigger than ourselves) about the loss of a loved one, a tragedy, pain, loss, and/or suffering is how we cope. When we lose the capacity for language, when there are absolutely no words to describe how we are feeling, when language is no longer sufficient, lamenting helps us move forward by allowing us to scream, shake, wail and yell. It is almost as if lament is the sound of our bodies dealing with chaos.

Laments are a cacophony of violent explosions that move in and through mourning, shame, anger, exile, degradation, fear and prayer. Through the outpouring of

⁴²⁶ Berlin, *Lamentations*, 5.

these emotions (which are appropriate to perform or feel in the direct aftermath of a tragedy or 10 years after) we are momentarily healed and comforted. I picture the evil spirit literally exiting a person's body through the wailing and screaming. Then, after the storm of the lament, when the people are taking little involuntary breaths in after a big cry, the spirit of God reenters their *neshemah*, until they can ultimately take in that big healing breath. Talmud describes the tradition of having at least two flute players at funerals.⁴²⁷ The sound of the flutes and the breath it takes to make those sounds, like the lament of humans, is ultimately a comforting act.

Both the work of Walter Brueggeman on lament psalms⁴²⁸ and our own experience inform us that one becomes more effective and empowered through lament. Lamenting allows you to be precise and concrete about what is wrong. Once you have started to articulate this, then you are bearing witness to what is wrong and how horrible it is. You respond with outrage and yet it empowers you to take a role in how to construct or reconstruct ways that are better.

This has major implications for how we can understand our relationship with God. Lament literature encourages and allows you to lash out, especially to God. Doing so, according to Bruggemann:

shifts the calculus and redresses the redistribution of power between the two parties, so that the petitionary party is taken seriously and the God who is addressed is newly engaged in the crisis in a way that puts God at risk.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁷ *Ketubot 46b*

⁴²⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *The Costly Loss of Lament*

⁴²⁹ Bruggemann, *The Costly Loss of Lament*, 59

The power and immediacy of lament literature demands to be taken seriously, even by God. Such a speech pattern and social usage keep all power relations under review and capable of redefinition.⁴³⁰

When lament is absent, therefore, there is a loss of genuine covenant interaction because the second party to the covenant has become voiceless or has a voice that is permitted to speak only praise.⁴³¹ These pleas directed to God offer rich and much needed wisdom for they demonstrate that despite hitting rock bottom there is yet a spark of life and a thread of hope for the people when all hope of recovery seem lost. This type of complaint language, after all, staves off a sense of total hopelessness.

Mike Tyson, the infamous boxer, once said, “Everyone has a plan ‘till they get punched in the mouth.” No one knows how they will respond to catastrophe, whether it comes about suddenly and unexpectedly or whether it afflicts you for a prolonged amount of time. Everyone reacts differently. The many voices in *Eicha* give readers moral imagination into that work. When the words and song of *Eicha* become alive they speak from the bottom of peoples souls. The words of Lamentations give a subjective experience of people who are suffering. To the extent that you can feel the way others who are suffering feel, this book allows you to take on others discomfort. It gives insight into human suffering and the different voices that come with it.

This book commands both empathy and sympathy for those that suffer. If we, through this book, find the compassion and humanity for *Am Israel* and take in their

⁴³⁰ Bruggemann, *The Costly Loss of Lament*, 59

⁴³¹ Bruggemann, *The Costly Loss of Lament*, 60

sufferings, then we surely should be able to look at the plight of those who live in our communities - the powerless, and those with less privilege, and have *Eicha* rush in: אֵין-לָהֶם מְנַחֵם, no one comforts them. If these words are really sacred then they rise up and unsettle you. If you see a child die as a result of war, terror, cancer, or gun violence, you hear:

עוֹלֵל וְיוֹנֵק בְּרַחֲבוֹת קִרְיָה

Little children and babies collapse in the streets of the city. (2:11)

The words of *Eicha* go on making us profoundly uncomfortable with its “uncensored language.” A tenet of Judaism is to fight for justice for we know what it is like to live in the land of Egypt. Because of *Eicha* we know what it means to live as sufferers. It also means we can imagine ourselves as the on-lookers and even, *chas v’shalom*, the perpetrators. *Eicha* can and should make us profoundly uncomfortable, depicting human nature at its most challenging and scary. Giving voice to the powerless is always challenging. Addressing, head-on, issues such as “why would God harm us like this?” is difficult and takes a lot of courage and honesty. It is not easy to stand up to God, hold your head high, and say, “How could you abandon us and do this to us? To little children?”

Our newspapers and television news programs are filled with images of war, rioting, police brutality, gun violence and violence towards women, children, the “LGBTQ+” community, immigrants, refugees and more. In a world devoid of lament, where we are not allowed to cry out in pain, either privately or publicly, where does this energy go?

As long as people reach out to God, there may yet be a way out of horrible circumstances, for at the core of the book is, according to O'Connor, "a theology of witnessing."⁴³² The five poems of *Lamentations* express pain, fury, and despair in an intense struggle for life. The many voices in the book beg God to be their witness, to see them, pay attention to them, and receive them in their pain. What could be more human than that? God never responds in *Lamentations*, however the book itself becomes a comforting witness.

⁴³² O'Connor, *Lamentations & The Tears of The World*, xiii.

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