

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION  
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)  
\*\*\*\*\*

**EIKHA: THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS**

**By Dr. Yael Ziegler**

**Shiur #22:  
Chapter 2: Part I (Verses 1-10)  
The Narrator's Account of Jerusalem's Destruction**

To describe the assault on the city, the narrator harnesses several tools of verbal artistry. Most prominently, as noted, synonyms shape the narrative. God's purposeful destruction is the subject of nearly every sentence in the first eight verses of the chapter. These sentences generally contain a unique verb denoting destruction, followed by the direct object of destruction – namely, a part of the city or Temple. Approximately twenty sentences (within ten verses) conform to this general pattern. Nevertheless, by varying words, syntax, and images and by subtly introducing nuances by means of linguistic allusions, the account does not become cumbersome or repetitive.

**Eikha 2:1**

איכה יעיב באפו  
אדני את־בת־ציון

השליך משמים ארץ  
תפארת ישראל

ולא־זכר הדם־רגליו  
ביום אפו

**How does He Becloud in His anger, God  
The Daughter of Zion**

**He threw from heavens to earth  
The glory of Israel**

**And He did not remember His footstool  
On the day of His anger**

The three sentences of the opening verse contain three different verbs (becloud, throw, [did not] remember) alongside three appellations for Jerusalem (daughter

of Zion, glory of Israel, [God's] footstool). While each term maintains an independent meaning or nuance, one goal of the verse is to pile up the synonyms. These synonyms illustrate the variety of ways in which God wreaks destruction against the city. They also allude to Jerusalem's multiple functions, which fail to dispose God to grant clemency to the doomed city. God disciplines both the city that reflects Israel's glory and the one that functions as God's own footstool.

God is the subject of nearly all of the verbs in this part of the chapter. Nevertheless, the opening sentence contains unusual syntax, which seems designed to deflect attention away from God. Instead of placing the subject (God) prior to the verb (as is customary in Hebrew syntax), the verse begins with the verb (beclouds) and the cause (anger), both of which appear before the subject (God). This hints to a certain discomfort in identifying the destroyer as God. Ironically, the verse's unusual arrangement may wind up highlighting God, as the reader strains to ascertain the identity of the agent of destruction.

This first sentence contains another noteworthy feature. To connect God's angry actions to its object, the daughter of Zion, the sentence employs a particle that identifies definite direct objects (*et*). Often omitted from biblical poetry, the usage of this particle emphasizes the manner in which God deliberately targets the daughter of Zion, leaving no room to doubt that God's intended target is His city.<sup>1</sup> This particle will appear again in the opening sentence of the following verse, ostensibly with a similar objective.

The initial verse of the chapter opens with God's anger (*be-apo*) and closes with it (*be-yom apo*). Enveloped by God's anger, this verse displays the consequence of divine wrath, supporting the oft-cited rabbinic idea that divine anger leads to punitive action:

R. Yehoshua ben Karcha said: Every fierce anger in the Bible is followed by a consequence. (*Zevachim* 102a)

In fact, God's ire takes concrete form throughout this chapter, re-emerging several times alongside God's annihilation of Jerusalem.

#### *Bat Zion; Tiferet Yisrael; Hadom Raglav*

The verse mentions three objects of God's punitive anger. The first sentence references *Bat Zion*, a common name for Jerusalem in *Eikha*, one that appears to designate the city in her elegance.<sup>2</sup> In this verse, God's anger casts a shadow over Jerusalem, obscuring her former loveliness.

<sup>1</sup> See Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> In *Eikha* 1:6, the term "*Bat Zion*," appears in the context of a city once filled with splendor that has now departed.

*Tiferet Yisrael* (Israel's glory) seems to reference something amorphous; it is an adjective for Israel, rather than an appellation. This points to the manner in which God wreaks havoc with Israel's splendor. Possibly, however, *Tiferet Yisrael* functions as an appellation for the Temple, referred to sometimes as Israel's glory:<sup>3</sup>

The Holy Temple and our glory (*tifarteinu*), where our fathers praised You, has become a burning fire, and all of our precious delights have been destroyed. (*Isaiah* 64:10)

The phrase *hadom raglav* (footstool) is an anthropomorphism that alludes to the notion that God rests His "feet" on earth.<sup>4</sup> This metaphor sometimes refers generally to the Temple (e.g. *Tehillim* 132:7),<sup>5</sup> while at times it refers specifically to the *aron* (ark), the sole furniture in the Holy of Holies (e.g. *I Chronicles* 28:2). A passage in *Isaiah* 66:1 offers a broader perspective, suggesting that all of the earth functions as God's footstool.<sup>6</sup> In our verse, this metaphor could refer to the Temple, the *aron*, or perhaps Jerusalem. God's neglect of His footstool indicates that God deliberately ruptures the bond that previously linked heaven and earth, discontinuing His relationship with His nation.

*Verbs: Ya'iv; Hishlikh, Lo Zachar*

*Ya'iv (Becloud)*

The obscurity of the initial verb in this chapter derives from its unusual verbal form. Some suggest that it is related to the word *ta'av*, abomination, which in its verbal form would mean to render something abhorrent,<sup>7</sup> perhaps even in a ritual sense (e.g. *Ezekiel* 16:52).<sup>8</sup> This would suggest that God brought filth and contamination upon Bat Zion – a fitting punishment for those who brought abominations into the Temple (*Ezekiel* 5:11). While this meaning certainly fits with the context, there is no other occasion in which the verbal form of the word *ta'av* appears without the letter *tav*.

More likely (as I have translated above), the word *ya'iv* is the verbal form of the

<sup>3</sup> *Isaiah* 13:19 refers to Babylon (presumably, the city) as the glory (*tiferet*) of the Chaldeans, raising the possibility that the glory of Israel refers to its capital city, Jerusalem.

<sup>4</sup> See also *Tehillim* 99:5.

<sup>5</sup> See *Eikha Rabba* 2:3 and the Targum and Rashi on our verse. Using a similar metaphor, *Ezekiel* 43:7 refers to the Temple as "the place of the soles of My feet." See also *Isaiah* 60:13.

<sup>6</sup> See R. Yosef Kara on *Eikha* 2:1.

<sup>7</sup> See T.F. McDaniel, "Philological Studies in Lamentations II," *Biblica* 49 (1968) 34-35. Berlin, *Lamentations*, pp. 61, 66, adopts this translation, citing *Tehillim* 106:40, which employs this verb to describe God's rejection of His inheritance in His anger.

<sup>8</sup> The Aramaic translation of this verse may allude to this meaning by using the verbal form of the word *kotz*, meaning to abhor or despise.

word *av*, which generally means a thicket of clouds or a mass that obscures the light (e.g. *II Samuel* 22:12; *Isaiah* 25:5). In its verbal form, this word would mean that God plunged Jerusalem into darkness.<sup>9</sup> Darkness suggests impending doom; its ominous presence supplants the light, warmth, and guidance that was formerly present in God's holy city.<sup>10</sup> Biblical passages often describe God as a source of light (e.g. *Tehillim* 27:1; *Micah* 7:9; *Isaiah* 60:19), and *Bereishit Rabba* 59:24 describes the light of Jerusalem, which emanates from God's presence in the city. It follows that when God abandons the city, Jerusalem's light vanishes. The verse, however, implies a more direct cause for the darkness. The verb *ya'iv* portrays God deliberately placing a thick barrier between heaven and earth, blocking human access to light, the heavens, and God.<sup>11</sup>

Often, biblical passages employ the word *av* in a positive context. The *av* has cleansing power associated with repentance (*Isaiah* 44:22), and carries moisture that facilitates growth (*Tehillim* 147:8). Elsewhere the *av he-anan* encases God when He speaks to the nation at Sinai (*Exodus* 19:9). This implies a protective role for the thick clouds, especially in the context of the human relationship with the divine. In contrast to these positive usages, in our verse, these masses of clouds have no positive function. Spurned by God, Jerusalem has lost its source of light, and God has plunged them into dense, impenetrable gloom.

### *Hishlikh*

God flings the glory of Israel spiraling downward; thrown from the heights of heavens, Jerusalem crashes heavily upon the earth.<sup>12</sup> A powerful metaphor of destruction, this image also points to God's fierce rejection. God can no longer abide Israel's company in His heavenly domain, and He forcefully expels *Tiferet Yisrael* from heaven.

Nevertheless, this metaphor also recalls that the glory of Israel formerly had an honored place in the heavens, serving, perhaps, as a direct conduit to God's throne.<sup>13</sup> This notion renders the fall of Israel's glory that much more shocking;

---

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Rashi on *Eikha* 2:1. Ibn Ezra appears to agree that the verb *ya'iv* is related to the word *av* (cloud). However, he explains that this sentence prepares us for the next: God first lifted Zion up to the clouds so that He could throw her from heaven to earth.

<sup>10</sup> *Midrashim* (e.g. *Bereishit Rabba* 59:24, cited above) note Jerusalem's luminescence, as do the liturgical poets (e.g. the blessings linked to the *shema* prayer in the morning service concludes, "Let a new light shine over Jerusalem so that we all merit quickly its light"). In a contemporary context, Naomi Shemer has popularized the notion of Jerusalem's radiant illumination in her acclaimed song, "Jerusalem of Gold" (and of copper and of light). Similarly, *Eikha* 4:1 opens by lamenting the tarnished gold, symbolizing Jerusalem's eclipsed shine.

<sup>11</sup> We will encounter a similar idea in *Eikha* 3:44, where God wraps Himself in a cloud to prevent Israel's prayers from penetrating to their destination.

<sup>12</sup> The *hiph'il* form of this verb with God as its subject is nearly always destructive. See e.g. *Joshua* 10:11; *II Kings* 13:23; 17:20; *Jeremiah* 52:3.

<sup>13</sup> Rabbinic sources (e.g. *Shir Ha-Shirim Rabba* 4:6; *Tanhuma, Vayakhel* 7) often maintain that the Temple's earthly manifestation had a heavenly parallel.

the colossal distance between the nation's previous elevated status and the present degradation is both dramatic and demeaning. This verse produces the well-known rabbinic dictum that conveys a sharp and terrible change in fortune: "From a high roof to the deepest pit."<sup>14</sup>

Chapter 2 returns repeatedly to Israel's plunging descent to the ground. Positioned a key seven times throughout the chapter,<sup>15</sup> the word *aretz* functions as a key word of the chapter. Fortresses collapse upon *the earth* (v. 2) and *the earth* swallows Jerusalem's gates (v. 9). Elders sit *on the earth* in mourning, alongside young maidens who lower their heads *to the earth* in grief (v.10). Jerusalem spills her innards *on the earth* (v. 11), while young and old lie dead *on the earth* in the streets of Jerusalem (v. 21). The city's structures merge with her inhabitants; God strikes down both buildings and humans. They in turn cower, sinking down to the ground in hapless mourning, spilling out their vitality, and readying themselves for death. Jerusalem's spiraling descent humbles her; formerly towering structures and people crash to the earth, lying crumpled, degraded, and depleted of their former heights.<sup>16</sup>

### *Ve-Lo Zakhar*

This verb (*zakhar*), "to remember," framed in the negative (*lo zakhar*), "He did not remember," is unlike the first two verbs, which depict God actively assailing His city. At first glance, this verb suggests a retreat from the angry image of God's furious assault, allowing God to withdraw from His dynamic destructive role. God simply does not remember His footstool; He is not aggressively acting against it.

Nevertheless, the negative formulation implies that God was supposed to remember; in choosing not to remember, God violates Israel's expectations. God did indeed promise to remember His covenant with our forefathers as well as the land (*Vayikra* 26:42), and we often praise God for remembering His eternal covenant (e.g. *Tehillim* 105:8) and His loyalty to His nation (*Tehillim* 98:3). This depiction of God may be less aggressive, but it kindles despair, hinting of broken promises and dashed hopes. God's decision not to remember implies intentionality, indicating the breakdown of a relationship founded upon an immutable belief in God's promises.

### *Judgment Day*

---

<sup>14</sup> See *Chagiga* 5b.

<sup>15</sup> Umberto Cassuto often notes the significance of seven appearances of a root in the identification of the *leitwort* of a biblical passage. See, for example, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), pp. 75, 91 ff. Due to its acrostic structure, there is little doubt that the chapters in *Eikha* are independent compositions. Therefore, the chapter's sevenfold deployment of the word *aretz* appears deliberate and meaningful.

<sup>16</sup> Prophets often describe high towers, buildings, or lofty trees as a metaphor for human arrogance. Hubris invariably leads to downfall, as both punishment and theological instruction. See e.g. *Isaiah* 2:9-22; *Amos* 2:9; *Ovadia* 1:3-4.

Jerusalem was not destroyed in a day; to confine God's wrath to one day obscures the prolonged rampage against Jerusalem. Thus, the phrase "on the day of God's anger," is not necessarily literal, but rather evokes a common biblical trope that alludes to a time in which God unleashes His judgments upon the world.<sup>17</sup> Biblical prophets often evoke this eschatological day, alternately referred to as "the day of God," the day of God's anger, or simply, "That Day" (*ba-yom/ha-yom ha-hu*).<sup>18</sup> This day involves divine scrutiny of human actions, which results in the punishment of evildoers and the restoration of justice to the world. Punishment can come in the form of a natural disaster or a war, sometimes involving cosmic alterations. Biblical theology assigns full responsibility for these cataclysmic shifts to God, relegating the human agents of war and destruction to a secondary or proxy role.

Naturally, divine judgement may be good or bad for individual nations, depending upon their own behavior:

"For it is a day for the Lord of Hosts against all [who are] high and mighty, against all [who are] elevated, and [they will be] humbled.  
(*Isaiah 2:12*)

This apocalyptic day of God's judgments upon Israel's enemies may be followed by a shift in the world order, paving the way for Israel to experience a national revival (e.g. *Joel 4:14-21*; *Ezekiel 38-39*; *Zekhariah 14*). However, prophets also issue dire admonitions for Israel regarding that apocalyptic day (see e.g. *Zephania 1:10-11*; *Ezekiel 7*; *Joel 1:14*). On that day, God may wield His judgements against Israel, who should not assume that they stand to gain from God's concentrated attention.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, *Eikha* refers to the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem as the day of God's anger, or, simply, "that day."<sup>20</sup> That day, according to *Eikha 2:1*, has come and gone, leaving Jerusalem shattered in its wake. What, then, will come of Jerusalem's future? Within the scheme of prophetic history, God has angrily judged Jerusalem on "the day of His anger," finding her guilty. Duly warned by the prophets, Jerusalem deserves her punishment. She lies in ruins, her power spent, a victim of her own transgressions. Is there any hope left?

The day of God may not be the culmination of history, nor a one-time event that constitutes the apocalyptic end of the world. Biblical history, after all, does not

---

<sup>17</sup> Biblical scholars discuss this topic extensively. For a review of some of the scholarship surrounding this subject, see Gottwald, *Lamentations*, p. 83, footnote 1.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. *Isaiah 2:11-17*; *Joel 1:15, 2:1, 4:14*; *Zephania 1-2*; *Zechariah 14*.

<sup>19</sup> *Amos 5:18* admonishes stridently (and somewhat cynically) against those who long for "God's day." The verse in *Amos* suggests that one should be cautious what one wishes for; only those deserving of God's favor will receive it on the day of divine scrutiny.

<sup>20</sup> See e.g. *Eikha 1:12*; *2:1, 21, 22*.

end with the catastrophic events of 586 BCE.<sup>21</sup> It continues to progress, albeit perhaps in a plodding fashion, through the period of *Shivat Zion*. Perhaps, then, the day of God is not epochal in the sense that it represents an end. It may instead refer to moments throughout human history in which God's attentions seem to focus upon the world, releasing divine judgment in a manner that disturbs the world order. This could account for the ceaseless rise and fall of empires and the ever-changing shift of power brokers. Moreover, one could easily regard various historical events (including natural disasters and manmade catastrophes) as "the day of God." While humans or nature act as the ostensible cause of these events, biblical theology regards God as directing these cataclysmic affairs, notably those that effect dramatic changes in the world.

To have hope in the future after the destruction of Jerusalem, Israel must maintain a broad biblical view of human political history. If Israel retains proper vigilance, surely the day will come that God will turn His scrutiny upon the world and find His nation meritorious. On that day, God will restore Israel's autonomy, allowing His nation to resume a leading role among the nations of the world. In that capacity, God will bestow upon Israel the mandate to spread God's instructions and morality, fulfilling the very reason for its existence.

---

<sup>21</sup> The significance of this point cannot be overstated. Although biblical history appears to conclude with the destruction of Jerusalem in *II Kings* 25, the historical biblical narrative resumes its account with Cyrus' decree and the period of Return to Zion in the books of *Ezra-Nehemia*, *Haggai*, *Zechariah*, and *Malachi*. This unexpected postscript is especially evident at the conclusion of the book of *Chronicles*, which closes with God spurring Cyrus to issue a promising declaration that Israel return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple (*II Chronicles* 35:22-23.) Israel's history has resumed, and with it, the hope for renewed opportunities to shape a better world.