

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

EIKHA: THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

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Shiur #25: Eikha Chapter 2 (continued)

Eikha 2:7

זָנַח אֲדֹנָי מִזְבְּחוֹ
נָאָר מִקִּדְשׁוֹ

הִסְגִּיר בְּיַד-אֹיֵב
חֹמֹת אֶרְמֹנָתָיָהּ

קוֹל נְתִנּוּ בְּבֵית-יְיָ
כַּיּוֹם מוֹעֵד

**God rejected His altar
He spurned His Temple**

**He delivered into the hands of the enemy
The walls of her palaces**

**They made sounds in the House of God
Like the day of a festival**

Despite the possessive form (*His Temple, His altar*), which emphasizes God's particular investment in these places, God persists in advancing their collapse. This is unsurprising; God professed His willingness to destroy His own house at its very inception, explicitly informing Solomon of the Temple's conditional status:

If you and your sons turn from Me and do not observe My commandments and the statutes that I have placed before you... then I will fling away from before me the house that I have consecrated to My name... Everyone who passes this [house] will be astonished and whistle, and they will say, "For what did God do this to this land and to this house?" (*I Kings 9:6-8*)

God has now repudiated the place consecrated to His service. He actively

enables the enemies to seize its wall. Though the enemies have destroyed God's Temple, this verse makes it clear that they have not undermined God's omnipotence. Indeed, it is God Who summons the enemies to punish His nation.¹ The notion of absolute divine power remains unmarred, in spite of the demolition of God's house.

The appalling reality is that Israel's enemies have prevailed; their whoops and cheers fill the house of God, replacing the sounds of festive worship. An ironic reminder (and a parody) of the joyful noise of festive celebration, the enemies' elated cries echo mockingly through the Temple precinct. The raucous din of devastation contrasts with the silent pain of the nation. Bereft of their Temple and festive days, the nation remains in a muted daze, wordlessly moaning and mourning (*Eikha* 2:5) as their enemies raze the Temple.

Without the place in which they commune with God, the nation flounders religiously. The absence of the Temple means that there is no avenue for reconciliation with God; there are no sin-offerings and no Day of Atonement ceremony. The Aramaic Targum explicitly adds this point in its textual embellishment of *Eikha* 2:6:

And He uprooted His Temple like a garden. *He destroyed the place established to atone for His people.* (Targum *Eikha* 2:6)

***Ni'eir* (spurned) and *Tehillim* 89**

The exact meaning of the word *ni'eir*, signifying God's approach toward His *Mikdash*, remains unclear.² In accordance with the first part of the binary sentence ("God rejected (*zanach*) His altar"), interpreters often suggest a parallel meaning for *ni'eir* – "spurned" or "abhorred."³

This verb appears only once more in the Bible, in *Tehillim* 89:40, to describe God's rejection of His covenant with the Davidic kings. Based on its usage in *Tehillim*, Rashi explains that the word means to abrogate or cancel, meaning that God causes the Temple to cease its function. Radak suggests that the word means to destroy, portraying God (once again) actively wrecking His Temple.⁴ Radak probably extrapolates this meaning from the parallel word in *Tehillim* 89:40, *chillel*, used to describe God profaning the Davidic crown by flinging it upon the ground. *Eikha* 2:2 also describes God profaning (*chillel*) the kingdom,

¹ Compare, similarly, Isaiah's explanation for Assyria's power and triumph over Israel (*Isaiah* 7:18-19; 10:5-6).

² See BDB, p. 611.

³ Ibn Ezra translates hate or forsake. See also Moshkovitz, *Eikha*, p. 13

⁴ See Radak in his *Sefer Shorashim* on the root of the word *ni'eir*.

using the same word as *Tehillim* 89:40.

Eikha's linguistic allusions to *Tehillim* 89 draws attention to the similarity between that chapter and our own in terms of its substance and tone. At first blush, *Tehillim* 89 appears to sketch a sublime portrait of divine munificence. Its initial thirty-eight verses comprise a grateful reminiscence of God's promise to David of eternal dynasty (*II Samuel* 7).⁵ Pivoting sharply, verses 39-52 veer from this idyllic portrait, expressing outrage and dismay over God's unfathomable abrogation of His promise. These latter verses in *Tehillim* 89 appear to be describing the catastrophe of 586 BCE – the humiliation of Jerusalem (42), the razing of her fortresses (41), the victory of her enemies (43), the discontinuation of the Davidic dynasty (40, 45-46), and the rejection of the king (39). The chapter culminates in an accusatory tone, employing a rhetorical question that belies the speaker's bewilderment:

Where is your steadfast loyalties of yesteryear, God, which you promised to David in your faithfulness? (*Tehillim* 89:50)

Famously, Ibn Ezra (*Tehillim* 89:2) cites a well-known "wise and pious" Spanish scholar who refused to read this harsh chapter due to its insolent accusations against God.⁶ This jarring Psalm is in accord with *Eikha* chapter 2, which adopts a similar tone toward God, culminating in a direct accusation against Him (2:20).

Mo'ed

The word *mo'ed* has appeared three times within the span of two verses (*Eikha* 2:6-7). In *Eikha* 1:4, the word *mo'ed*, which means something appointed, may be referring to either place or time (or perhaps both). In *Eikha* 2:6, its first usage suggests an appointed place (the Temple), while its second appearance refers to an appointed time (namely, a festival). Our verse (2:7) explicitly describes a sound that recalls the *yom mo'ed*, meaning the appointed day (festive days), but its location in the house of God alludes to the spatial *mo'ed* as well. God has upended those spheres previously consecrated by Him. Instead of a time designated by God to be a hallowed celebration, God now selects a day for punishment (*Eikha* 1:5; 2:22). And in place of the sacred space where humans

⁵ Linguistic similarities that connect the first part of this chapter to *II Samuel* 7 abound, evoking the chapter that contains God's covenantal promises to David. See, for example, *Tehillim* 89:27-28, 33 and *II Samuel* 7:14; *Tehillim* 89:34 and *II Samuel* 7:15-16; *Tehillim* 89:4, 21 and *II Samuel* 7:5, 8, 26.

⁶ Based on similar references in other places in Ibn Ezra's commentary, some scholars suggest that Ibn Ezra refers to R. Yehuda Halevi, author of the *Kuzari*. See N. Elyakim, "Heksherim ben R. Yehuda Ha-Levi Ve-Rabbi A. Ibn Ezra Be-Parshanut Ha-Mikra," *Shema'atin* (1998) pp. 85-103 [Hebrew].

encounter the divine, God allows that place to be filled with the triumphant shouts of those who ransack and desecrate it.

Eikha 2:8

חָשַׁב יְקוּק לְהַשְׁחִית
חוֹמַת בַּת-צִיּוֹן

גָּטָה קוֹ
לֹא-הִשִּׁיב יָדוֹ מִבִּלְעַ

וַיֵּאבְדוּ-חַל וְחוֹמָה
יחדו אָמְלְלוּ

**God determined to destroy
The wall of Bat Zion**

**He spread out a line
And did not withdraw His hand from swallowing**

**And He made the rampart and the wall mourn
Together they were miserable⁷**

Instead of dwelling on the jubilant shouts of the enemies, the verse returns our attention back to God, who is the actual perpetrator of the catastrophe. God's assault on Jerusalem is not spontaneous, nor is it an outburst of divine wrath. God planned this catastrophe with forethought and careful preparation. The word *chashav* suggests that God thought deeply about Jerusalem's destruction, long before He carried it out.⁸ Rashi notes that the word *chashav* is in the past tense, indicating that God thought about destroying Jerusalem for quite a long time:

It has been many days since it occurred to God to do this [destroy the city]. As it says, "Because this city has aroused My anger and

⁷ The word *umlal* often appears in conjunction with the word mourn, suggesting a similar or parallel meaning (see e.g. *Isaiah* 33:9; *Jeremiah* 14:2; *Hosea* 4:3). BDB, p. 51 offers two suggested meanings, languish or feeble. It is difficult, based on context alone, to select which is the better meaning in the various biblical passages. In biblical passages, the word variously describes the mourning/languishing of the produce, the land, the gates of the city, or humans. The context often involves food and children (see, for example, *Joel* 1:10; *Isaiah* 19:8; *Jeremiah* 15:9). The usage of the word commonly evokes dashed hopes or expectations. For example, *Jeremiah* 14:2 describes the mourning (*umlalu*) of Judah's gates, once the center of its bustling trade and economic activity. Likewise, in our verse, Jerusalem's physical edifices mourn in contrast to their previous strength and perceived immutability.

⁸ Jeremiah also uses the verb *chashav* to portray God's premeditated decision to destroy Judah and Jerusalem (*Jeremiah* 18:11, 26:3, 36:3). In a positive reversal, Jeremiah (29:11) uses the word *chashav* to describe God contemplating and planning Judah's redemption.

My wrath [from the day that they built it until today] and it must be removed from before Me” (*Jeremiah* 32:31). (Rashi, *Eikha* 2:8)

The line that God spreads appears to be a reference to the measuring line used by builders (see *Jeremiah* 31:38; *Ezekiel* 47:3; *Zechariah* 1:16), or perhaps to that used for assuming ownership of land (*Isaiah* 34:17). In an ironic parody of construction and possession, God carefully stretches out a line to measure Jerusalem for destruction and loss of ownership.⁹ Instead of imposing order, this line inflicts chaos. In this spirit, Ibn Ezra describes this destructive line as the same one employed by Isaiah (34:11) to describe God bringing destruction upon Edom with a “*kav tohu (ve-avnei vohu)*.”¹⁰

The Personification of Jerusalem

To conclude the verse, God imposes mourning upon the ramparts and the walls of the city. These fortifications symbolize the city’s defensive strength and divine presence (see *Isaiah* 26:1; *Tehillim* 48:14).¹¹ The mourning of the walls and rampart indicates their failure to function properly, leaving Jerusalem vulnerable. The walls and ramparts mourn “together,” recalling the value of communal togetherness that once drew the city’s inhabitants together (*Tehillim* 122:3): “Built-up Jerusalem: A city that knits people together (*yachdav*).”¹² The loss of the city that once united the nation resonates hauntingly, as only the city’s physical edifices remain together in their state of mourning.

The city’s external barriers assume personality and pathos in this verse.¹³ The mourning of the rampart and walls links up with that of Jerusalem’s inhabitants, whose mourning and moaning (verse 5) resonates hauntingly. Animated by its mourning, the city merges with her inhabitants, and they become

⁹ For a similar usage, see *II Kings* 21:13; *Isaiah* 28:17. See also *Amos* 7:7-9.

¹⁰ The phrase *tohu va-vohu* recalls primordial chaos, prior to God’s creative structuring of the world (sometimes described with the same verb used here, *nata*. See e.g. *Isaiah* 40:22; 44:24; *Jeremiah* 10:12; 51:15). Thus, God, Who created the world, maintains the right to destroy it when it is no longer fulfilling its purpose.

¹¹ Several chapters in the book of *Tehillim* dwell on the city of Jerusalem, describing her structure, beauty, and religious significance (see chs. 46, 48, 50, 76, 84, 87, 122). Scholars refer to these chapters as “Zion Psalms” (e.g. Albrektson, pp. 224-230; Berlin, p. 25). The first half of this chapter constitutes the unravelling of the idyllic description of Jerusalem, the diametrical opposite of the so-called “Zion Psalms.”

¹² Although there are different ways to interpret this verse, the above translation is based on the explanation of both Ibn Ezra and Radak on *Tehillim* 122:3.

¹³ This personification of the city is common, as we have already seen in our discussion of chapter 1. *Jeremiah* 14:2 (and *Isaiah* 3:26) also employs the description of Jerusalem’s gates mourning. Nevertheless, Rasag does not accept this anthropological description of the city, explaining that this verse refers to the mourning of the *people* on the rampart and wall.

indistinguishable one from the other. In our next two verses, we will see the gates sinking to the ground in defeat (verse 9), closely followed by the actions of the elders of Zion (verse 10). The destruction of the city constitutes the destruction of the vitality of the people.

Nevertheless, Jerusalem's destruction does not result in her demise, nor does it return her to her natural state as an inanimate city of stones and material, lacking personality and vitality. By preserving Jerusalem's human persona, even as she mourns and ceases to function effectively, the city continues to exist. Her walls and ramparts remain as alive in destruction as they were in their heyday. Thus, Israel can retain its emotional attachment to its vibrant city, despite the fact that the city lies in ruins. For under those ruins, one still senses that the city is alive; it breathes and moves, however miserably. Dulled but not destroyed, the city's personification renders it a powerful magnet to return those who will soon exit Jerusalem. If Jerusalem still lives, Israel will seek to return to her. Moreover, if the city still breathes, then so does Israel, whose immutability remains connected to that of her eternal city. The city's continued existence ultimately serves as a basis for Israel's continued existence, boosting the nation's hopes and aspirations to rebuild the city.