**“The Lord has become like an enemy” - Lamentations 2**

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**Abstract:**

As various scholars have shown, the metaphor is not merely a literary device that adorns a work; rather, through metaphor, we construct, renew, and dismantle the reality in which we live. By analyzing the metaphors of fire, water, and God’s hand that are interwoven throughout Lam 2, I wish to point out the distinctive, and perhaps even subversive, theological message that emerges from this lament. Scholarship has proposed different explanations about the intent of the lament. In this article, I propose a new direction: Lamentations 2 presents a distinctive theological conception according to which there is room for defiance and for honest speech with the deity, while pouring out one’s heart like water. Moreover, in this lament, pouring out the heart is presented as the only consolation that can be offered in the face of a calamity that is as great as the sea. This theological message emerges from an analysis of the metaphors of fire, water, and God’s hand, by identifying the ‘three and four’ structure, by examining the wording of verse 18, and by pointing to a double ambiguity at the end of the lament.

**Introduction**

The Bible and other ancient Near Eastern literature often depict the deity as a warrior. Usually, God fights against His people’s enemies; however, some biblical passages portray God as fighting against His own people. For example: “Therefore He became **their enemy; He Himself fought against them**” (Isa 63:10). A depiction of God as a warrior who shoots arrows at his own people also appears in the poem of *Ha’azinu*: “I will heap disasters upon them, spend My arrows against them” (Deut 32:23). However, it seems that the most extreme example appears in Lam 2. God is described in the third person as one who harms His people, not accidentally but deliberately (Lam 2:8; 17). This assault is portrayed through various images and metaphors. God is depicted as fire: “he has burned like a flaming fire in Jacob, consuming all around” (2:3); as a warrior, “He has bent his bow like an enemy, with His right hand set like a foe; He has killed all in whom my eyes delighted” (2:4); and as an enemy, “The Lord has become like an enemy; He has destroyed Israel” (2:5;3:12).

In this article I analyze the metaphors in Lam 2. Various scholars have noted that the function of metaphor is not merely an ornamental literary device, but rather, the text uses metaphors to construct, renew, and dismantle the reality in which we live.[[1]](#footnote-1) We use metaphors in everyday discourse, not only in the domains of literature and rhetoric.[[2]](#footnote-2) Accordingly, an analysis of biblical metaphors can help uncover something of the modes of thought of their authors.[[3]](#footnote-3) To interpret a given metaphor properly, we must strive to infer the fullness of its meaning. This task requires us to imagine the entire complex of images and ideas that arise from it.[[4]](#footnote-4) By analyzing the various metaphors interwoven throughout Lam 2, I wish to expose the theological message that, in my opinion, its author sought to convey to his readers. Despite the constraints of the acrostic, the lament’s author succeeds in creating a sophisticated structure through the development of metaphors and literary motifs.[[5]](#footnote-5) By identifying the lament’s structure and analyzing the various metaphors that he uses, we can shed light on the distinctive, and perhaps even subversive, theological message that emerges.

**Theology of Lamentations:** Lamentations consists of five laments, not all of which were written at the same time. Some were composed close to the events of the destruction, while others were written later, commenting on the events in hindsight.[[6]](#footnote-6) Therefore, it is not surprising to find diversity in the feelings, intensity of emotion, and the theological concepts reflected in them. The center of the scroll (3:21-42) articulates the theological view that vindicates God and emphasizes His goodness. Thus, for example: “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end” (3:22); “The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him” (3:25). This concept is also expressed in chapter 1: “The Lord is in the right” (1:18). Alongside vindicating God, one can identify, throughout Lamentations, a widespread posture of contrition. This concept appears in almost all the laments. At times, it appears in the third person: “Jerusalem sinned grievously; so she has become a mockery” (1:8); “For the chastisement of My people has been greater than the punishment of Sodom” (4:6); “This was for the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed the blood of the righteous in the midst of her” (4:13). At other times, it appars in the first person: “Look, O Lord, and see how worthless I have become” (1:11); “We have transgressed and rebelled, and you have not forgiven” (3:42); “The crown has fallen from our head; woe to us, for we have sinned!” (5:16).

Lamentations also presents a different theological outlook which, instead of confessing sin, points an accusing finger upward and sharply defies God. Rather than accepting His actions, it voices anger and resentment toward Him. This outlook is found in Lam 2 and in parts of Lam 3.[[7]](#footnote-7) Yet, though the editor of Lamentations chose to include laments that express differing and even opposing theological orientations, many commentators and scholars of Lamentations have sought to blur the voices of defiance and to paint all the laments in similar colors— effacing the confrontation with God and emphasizing voices of conciliation and acceptance of Him.[[8]](#footnote-8) This trend is evident in Lamentations in general, and specifically in the interpretation of Lam 2. Thus, for example, various scholars have argued that this lament aims to confess sin and to provide a theological explanation for the destruction, according to which the destruction and great suffering must be linked to Judah’s iniquities.[[9]](#footnote-9) This reading places an emphasis on verse 14, where Daughter Zion’s iniquity is mentioned: “Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed **your iniquity** to restore your fortunes, but have seen oracles for you that are false and misleading” (2:14). However, acknowledging sin occupies a marginal place in this lament, where it is only mentioned once. Even then, it differs from the descriptions of Jerusalem’s sin in the other laments: It is neither directly stated (as it is in 1:8 or 4:6), nor put in the mouth of Daughter Zion (as in 1:11, 3:42). Rather, it appears only incidentally in relation to the priests who did not faithfully fulfill their role and did not reprove Daughter Zion for her iniquity, instead promising her “oracles for you that are false and misleading” (2:14). Additionally, apart from this verse, throughout the lament the accusatory finger is not pointed at Daughter Zion, but rather at heaven. The dominant sentiment throughout the lament is one of anger, not of acceptance.

Following this, other scholars have argued that the purpose of this lament is not to confess sin, but rather to express anger and defiance. However, unlike other laments, this one does not include a prayer or address God. For example, Adele Berlin argued in her commentary on Lamentations that “Unlike other laments, this lament does not praise God or call upon His power or His goodness to save. In fact, this lament contains no petition to God. It is therefore not a genuine prayer, but a rhetorical device by which the poet once again expresses his anger, using Jerusalem’s voice.”[[10]](#footnote-10) This view has been voiced by other scholars as well.[[11]](#footnote-11) Assis, for example, argued that it reflects an estrangement from God: “This lament expresses the greatest distance from God, precisely where there is an expectation that there would be an address to Him. Such an address is conspicuously absent here. This lament most powerfully expresses the problem with which the scroll grapples; it expresses the people’s sense that the destruction God brought upon Jerusalem and upon the people is a severing of the bond between them. Therefore there is no address to God in the lament.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

In contrast to this claim, I wish to argue that this lament is indeed defiant, from beginning to end. The defiance is so severe that the author feels the need to blur its ending. However, in my view, this lament does not express distance or estrangement from God; on the contrary, it reflects closeness, with prayer an important and central theme within it. As I will show below, the lamenter presents the direct and sincere address to God, pouring out his heart **like water**, as the only possible solution in the face of a ruin as vast **as the sea.** I will present the unique theological concept that emerges from this lament through an analysis of the metaphors of fire and water, the metaphor of God’s hand, and by suggesting a new structure.

1. **The metaphor of fire: God**

It is not surprising that the lamenter makes extensive use of the fire metaphor, since the image of conflagration is directly linked to the destruction of the temple. We shall now examine the appearance of the fire metaphor and consider its development and contribution to conveying the lament’s message:

**1.1 “He has poured out His fury like fire”**

The fire metaphor appears in Lam 2:4. God is described as one who pours out his wrath: “In the tent of daughter Zion **… He has poured out His fury like fire**.” The divine wrath, already mentioned in this lament by various epithets such as “anger” (1), “wrath” (2), and “fierce anger” (3), is here likened to a blazing fire that God is imagined to have rained down upon the temple.[[13]](#footnote-13) The depiction of anger and wrath by means of the fire metaphor is common in the Bible (see Est 1:12; Deut 32:22; Isa 30:27; Jer 4:4, 21:12; and others). The relationship between the source domain (fire) and the target domain (anger) is clear:[[14]](#footnote-14) Just as an angry person becomes hot, searing, flushed, and at times also harms his surroundings, so the burning fire is red, hot, searing, and harmful, consuming that which is near it.

* 1. **“He has burned like a flaming fire in Jacob”**

In verse 4 God is described as one who pours out his wrath like fire; but in the preceding verse, God **Himself** is described as fire: “He has burned like a flaming fire in Jacob, consuming all around.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Theologically, this description is more difficult, since God Himself is described as a flame that burns and consumes its surroundings.[[16]](#footnote-16) This metaphor evokes a connotation of a sudden, and perhaps even uncontrollable, outburst, like a fire spreading in a field of thorns, and thus challenges the concept of an omnipotent God. In the Septuagint, “וַיִּבְעַר” (“he has burned”) appears as a transitive verb: “καὶ **ἀνῆψεν** ἐν Ιακωβ ὡς πῦρ φλόγα, καὶ κατέφαγεν πάντα τὰ κύκλῳ.” According to the Septuagint, then, God kindled a fire in Jacob. However, this reading is difficult, as it reflects the comparative כ (ὡς), thus meaning that God burned in Jacob like a fire. This expression appears difficult because it is elliptical; it is not clear what God burned in Jacob that is like fire. Therefore, it seems that the Masoretic text is primary, and the Septuagint reflects an early interpretation arising from theological motives, seeking to soften the depiction of God as a burning fire and replace it with the depiction of God who kindles a fire and sends it to devour and burn his sanctuary.[[17]](#footnote-17) A similar softening can also be found in the lament over the destruction of the Temple in Ps 79:5, where the igniting is not attributed directly to God but to his jealousy: “How long, O Lord? Will you be angry forever? Will your jealous wrath burn like fire?” A comparison between these laments can teach us about the distinctive concept reflected in Lam 2:

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| Ps 79 | Lam 2 |
| “How long, O Lord? Will you be angry forever? Will your jealous wrath **burn like fire**?” (5) | “He has **burned** like a flaming **fire** **in Jacob,** consuming all around” (3) |
| “**Pour out your anger** on the nations that do not know you, and on the kingdoms that do not call on your name” (6) | “In the tent of daughter Zion; He **poured** out his **wrath** like fire” (4) |
| “For they have **devoured** Jacob and **laid waste** his **habitation**” (7) | “The Lord has destroyed without mercy all the **dwellings of Jacob”** (2) |

The image of blazing fire appears in these two laments, as well as the abodes of Jacob (“neveh/ne’ot Ya‘akov”), the verb ’-k-l, and the outpouring of God’s wrath. However, against this background of similarity, a striking difference emerges. First, Ps 79 attributes the destruction of the sanctuary to the nations: “For they have devoured **Jacob** and laid waste his **habitation”** (7); whereas Lam 2:2 attributes the destruction of the abodes of Jacob to God and not the human enemy, “The Lord has destroyed without mercy all the **dwellings of Jacob**; in his wrath He has broken down the fortresses of daughter Judah.” In addition, in Ps 79 the lamenter asks God to pour his wrath upon the nations: “**Pour out your anger** on the nations that do not know you, and on the kingdoms that do not call on your name” (6). By contrast, Lam 2 describes God described as the one who poured his wrath upon His people: “In the tent of Daughter Zion He has **poured out** his fury like **fire”** (4). The comparison with Ps 79 underscores the distinctive portrayal in Lam 2, according to which God is the one who strikes, He is the one who pours out His wrath like fire, He Himself blazes like fire (and not only his jealousy), and the target of the attack is His own people.

1. **Between fire and water: The water metaphor—Daughter Zion**

As various scholars have noted, when analyzing metaphors one must apprehend their meaning holistically rather than atomistically.[[18]](#footnote-18) Set against the fire metaphor, the motif of water is interwoven throughout the entire lament. We can elucidate the relationship between fire and water by tracing the root š‑p‑ḥ, which runs through the lament like a scarlet thread:

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| “…He has killed all in whom we took pride in the tent of daughter Zion; He has **poured out** his fury like fire” (4) | The Lord |
| “…My bile is **poured out** on the ground because of the destruction of My people, because children and babes faint in the streets of the city” (11) | The lamenter |
| “... As their life is poured out on their mothers’ **bosom**” (12) | The children |
| “... **Pour out** your heart like water before the presence of the Lord; lift your hands to Him for the lives of your children, who faint for hunger at the head of every street” (19) | Daughter Zion |

At the beginning of the lament, killing the “eye’s delights”, the best of the young men, is attributed to God, who is described as one who “**has poured out** his wrath like fire” in the tent of Daughter Zion (4). In v. 11 this root is attributed to the lamenter who, in the wake of the harm done to the children, is no longer able to depict the harsh reality in an objective, external manner. The sight of the children shocks the lamenter, and out of a sense of shared fate, he cries: “My bile is **poured out** on the ground because of the destruction of My people” (11). In the next verse (12) the root sh-p-kh appears in connection with the nursing children, who faint and fall like the slain in the streets of the city, and their life is poured out as they lie in their mothers’ bosom, the safe place where they expected to find shelter, protection, and food: “… As their life is **poured out** on their mothers’ bosom” (12). The fourth and final time, this root appears in relation to Daughter Zion, whom the lamenter addresses, recommending that she “**Pour out** your heart like water before the presence of the Lord” (19). One must note the special connection between the first occurrence of the root sh-p-kh (4) and its last (19):

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| God | Daughter Zion |
| **He has poured out his wrath like fire** (4) | **Pour out your heart like water** (19) |

Whereas at the beginning of the lament God is described as one who has **poured out** ***his wrath like fire***, at the end, Daughter Zion is called upon to **pour out** ***her heart like water***. Throughout the lamemt the deity is depicted by the metaphor of fire (3, 4), whereas Daughter Zion is depicted by images drawn from the semantic field of water:

1. Your ruin is vast a**s the sea;** who can heal you? (13)
2. Let tears stream down like a **torrent** day and night! (18)
3. Pour out your heart like **water** before the presence of the Lord (19)

In v. 13 the lamenter addresses Daughter Zion with a rhetorical question: “What can I say for you, to what compare you, O daughter Jerusalem? To what can I liken you, that I may comfort you, O virgin Daughter Zion? For vast as the sea is your ruin; who can heal you?” (2:13) The ruin is as deep as the sea, and the question is who can provide healing. The use of imagery from the semantic field of water underscores the connection between the question that the lamenter poses to Daughter Zion in v. 13 and his answer, which appears in vv. 18–19. The author of the lament intimates that the ruin, deep as **the sea**,can findremedy through pouring out the heart **like water** in the presence of God. Pouring out the heart does not signify theodicy, an emphasis on His goodness and mercy, or beating one’s breast in confession. In this lament, pouring out the heart expresses a sincere and direct stance before God. A cry that arises from ruin and pain, from anger, defiance, and resentment. This reading can be reinforced by examining the lament’s structure:

* 1. **A three-and-four structure**

Various scholars have noted that in vv. 14–16 one can discern three answers that seek to respond to the question posed in v. 13, “Who can heal you?”[[19]](#footnote-19) The prophets did not fulfill their role and disappointed with their false prophecies (14); the passersby clapped their hands, hissed, and wagged their heads in astonishment (15); and the enemies, of course, were of no help. These opened their mouths, hissed, gnashed their teeth, and said that the day they had so long awaited had arrived (16). However, in my view, these verses should also include v.17, and be understood as a continuation of the quotation of the enemies’ words, which begins in v. 16 with the cry “We have devoured her!” Refusing the passersby (15) and enemies’ (16-17) assistance is described in parallel:

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|  | Passersby | Enemies |
| Physical action | (15) They clapped their hands **at you** | (16) They opened their mouths **against you** |
| all+ the subject of the sentence | **All** who pass along the way | **All** your enemies |
| Two physical actions | **They hissed**  and they wagged their heads at daughter Jerusalem | **They hissed**  and they gnashed their teeth |
| Quoting their words | “Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth?” | They said: “We have devoured her! Ah, this is the day we longed for; at last we have seen it: (17) The Lord has done what He purposed; He has carried out his threat; as He ordained long ago; He has demolished without pity; He has made the enemy rejoice over you; He has exalted the might of your foes." |

At the outset, a physical action is described in three words: a verb, then the word “at you,” and then the object. These actions express contempt or threat.[[20]](#footnote-20) Next, the subject of the sentence appears together with the word “all.” Then two additional physical actions are mentioned; the first action is identical, “they hissed,” followed by an action that relates to a body part: “and they wagged their head,” “and they gnashed a tooth.”[[21]](#footnote-21) Finally, their words are quoted: Passersby ask in astonishment, “Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth?,”[[22]](#footnote-22) while the enemies proclaim that the day they so longed for has arrived. And what is that day? They explain in v. 17: the day when God carried out the decree that He devised, the day when He did what He had already commanded from days of old (see Isa 10:12), when He destroyed and did not spare. Subsequently, the enemies speak about themselves in the third person, yet these statements should be seen as a continuation of their quoted words, since these are still addressed in the second person to Daughter Zion.[[23]](#footnote-23) The destruction and lack of compassion are manifested in that “The enemy has exulted over you; they have raised the horn of your foes.” In contrast to Micah’s prophecy, “Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy” (Mic 7:8), God caused the enemies indeed to rejoice over the downfall of Daughter Zion. Unlike Israel’s strength (lit.:“horn”), mentioned at the beginning of the lament, which God cut off in fierce anger (2:3), He raised the enemies’ strength.

If we adopt this reading and view vv. 13–17 as describing three answers that are rejected one after another, then vv. 18–19 describe the fourth member in the “three and four” pattern.[[24]](#footnote-24) These verses present a fourth, essentially different answer, which the lamenter accepts as correct:

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| To what can I liken you, that I may comfort you, O virgin Daughter Zion?”  For vast **as the sea** is your ruin; who can heal you? |  |
|  | 1. (14) Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes, but have seen oracles for you that are false and misleading. |
|  | 1. (15) All who pass along the way clap their hands at you; they hiss and wag their heads at daughter Jerusalem; “Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth?” |
|  | 1. (16) All your enemies open their mouths against you; they hiss, they gnash their teeth; they cry: “We have devoured her! Ah, this is the day we longed for; at last we have seen it!”   (17) The Lord has done what He purposed; He has carried out his threat; as He ordained long ago, He has demolished without pity; He has made the enemy rejoice over you and exalted the might of your foes. |
| 1. (18) Cry aloud to the Lord, O wall of daughter Zion! Let tears **stream down like a torrent** day and night! Give yourself no rest, your eyes no respite. (19) Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches! **Pour out your heart like water** before the presence of the Lord! Lift your hands to Him for the lives of your children, who faint for hunger in every street. |  |

After rejecting the three options for human comforters, the lamenter proposes that Daughter Zion directly address God with her cry. Verse 18 opens with the words: “Their heart cried to the Lord.” This verse seems obscure and deviates from its context. From v. 13 through v. 19 the lamenter addresses Jerusalem in the second person, whereas here he interrupts his address to Daughter Zion and shifts to a third-person description. Moreover, the subject of the sentence is unclear: Whose heart cried? The people’s ? Or perhaps the children, mentioned in vv. 11–12?[[25]](#footnote-25) The collocation cry + heart is unfamiliar;[[26]](#footnote-26) likewise, it is difficult to understand the broader context of the verse. In view of all these difficulties, I believe, following most modern commentators, that the MT is corrupt here, and that one should read “Cry out,” as an imperative form, similar to the verbs “bring down,” “arise,” “sing out,” “pour out,” and “lift up.”[[27]](#footnote-27)

Regarding the word "לבם" (“their heart”), Albakston proposed that it is a corruption and that the original read "לִבָּה," meaning “anger,” close to the Akkadian libbātu (anger), and to the Aramaic "לבתא."[[28]](#footnote-28) This proposal was based on Driver’s suggestion that the word "לִבָּתֵךְ" in Ezek 16:30 should be understood in the sense of anger.[[29]](#footnote-29) According to this proposal, the word "לִבָּה" should be read similarly to the word "חמס" mentioned in Job (19:7) in the context of the cry of the suffering righteous: “Even when I cry out, ‘Violence!’”

This proposal is indeed persuasive and also accords well with the context of the verses. Verses 18–19 should be read in sequence. The lamenter addresses Daughter Zion[[30]](#footnote-30) and recommends that she turn to God directly, cry out to Him in anger, let her tears fall without ceasing, and pour out her heart in candor. The proposed textual emendation is perhaps surprising: How can the lamenter propose that Daughter Zion cry out in anger at God? Yet this would precisely cohere with the message that emerges from the lament in general, and from v. 19 in particular. The lamenter proposes that Daughter Zion pour out her heart candidly, in direct address to God, “before the presence of the Lord.” He does not propose that she confess her sins, repent, or praise God, but rather, that she lift up her hands “for the lives of your children, who faint for hunger at the head of every street” (19). Daughter Zion’s prayer on behalf of her children is a prayer of a cry born of anger and protest and is directed to God, who has harmed the innocent, corresponding with the lamenter’s proposal to cry out in anger.

This reading also accords well with the broader context. After rejecting the first three answers, the lamenter offers Daughter Zion a fourth answer that differs from its predecessors. He proposees that Daughter Zion turn to God (and not to a human agent), addressing Him with her cry for the life of her children.[[31]](#footnote-31) The virtue of the waters is manifest in their capacity to extinguish the burning fire. The use of the fire-and-water metaphor intimates to readers a source of consolation: The ruin, great **like the sea** (13), can be healed through tears flowing **like a torrent** and through pouring out the heart **like water** before God.

Daughter Zion heeds the lamenter’s counsel, and in vv. 20–22 addresses God directly. Yet, in this address, she does not praise God or confess her sin; rather, as she was urged, she cries out in anger, pours out her heart candidly, defies, and cries out for the life of her children. She opens with the phrase “Look, O Lord, and see,” which already appeared in chapter 1. Yet how great the difference:

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| Lam 1 – confession of sin | Lam 2 – defiance |
| “Look, O Lord, and see  how worthless I have become.” (1:11) | “Look, O Lord, and consider  To whom have you done this?!” (2:20) |

Whereas in chapter 1 Daughter Zion bewails her sins, in chapter 2 she points an accusing finger upward and asks, “to whom have you **done** this?” This powerful question includes a wordplay (homophone), since the verb על״ל is connected to the words “עולל ויונק” mentioned in v. 11, hinting that it is God who has perpetrated the worst of all and has struck the children, the innocent.[[32]](#footnote-32)

* 1. **God-as-fire, Daughter-Zion-as-water: A gendered division**

The depiction of the deity as fire, as a warrior, and as an enemy also appears in Sumerian laments over a city’s destruction.[[33]](#footnote-33) However, the comparison with the Sumerian laments highlights the difference: In the Sumerian laments the god or goddess is portrayed as an enemy, but at the same time also as one who weeps in torrents over the devastation they witness. In the Eridu Lament, for example, Enki remains outside his city and weeps bitter tears.[[34]](#footnote-34) In the Lamentation over the Destruction of the City of Ur, the goddess Ningal is portrayed as an enemy, yet at the same time also as a compassionate goddess who sheds tears and weeps over her city:

“Will Mother Ningal stand outside her city as an enemy,

the woman will weep bitterly over her house because it has been plundered

the lady will weep bitterly over the temple of Ur because it has been plundered” (lines 256–254)[[35]](#footnote-35)

By contrast, in Lam 2 God does not weep. The absolute lack of divine compassion in Lam 2 in particular, and in the book of Lamentations as a whole, stands in sharp contrast to most Sumerian laments.[[36]](#footnote-36) This absence apparently rankled the Sages, who filled the gap and depicted the biblical God as weeping over the destruction of His city, calling upon the angels to join Him.[[37]](#footnote-37) However, the depiction of a weeping God is absent from Lamentations. In contrast to the Sumerian lament over the destruction of Ur, where the goddess Ningal is depicted both as an enemy and as one who weeps and sheds tears over her city, the book of Lamentations presents a clearly gendered division of roles: God is depicted as an enemy through metaphors associated with fire and war (Lam 2:3, 4, 5), whereas Daughter Zion, the personified surrogate of the feminine deity, is portrayed through various images associated with water (Lam 2:13, 18, 19). An analysis of the metaphor explains Daughter Zion’s important role: Just as water has the capacity to extinguish a blazing fire, so Daughter Zion is presented as able to quench the divine conflagration.[[38]](#footnote-38) She can fulfill this role through sincere prayer to God—a prayer of anger, outcry, and defiance—by pouring out her heart like water. This role is specifically entrusted to the female figure, reflecting the broader social phenomenon found in various cultures both in antiquity and in our own day, whereby the role of lamenters is reserved for women.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Additionally, this metaphor emphasizes God’s active part in the destruction. God is portrayed as acting directly, Himself striking His people. God not only pours out his wrath like fire, but is depicted as a fire burning in His own being. A similar conception emerges from tracing the metaphor of God’s hand, as we shall see below:

1. **The metaphor of God’s hand** 
   1. **“He has withdrawn His right hand from them in the face of the enemy” (2:3)**

In the Bible, God’s right hand symbolizes His might and power. For example, “The right hand of God is valiant; the right hand of God is exalted” (Ps 118:15-16). God’s right hand strikes the enemies and brings about their downfall: “Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power— your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy” (Exod 15:6); “Its power and might are manifest from of old, following its struggle with the sea” (Isa 51:9).

By contrast, in Lam 2, God’s hand retreats and does not hinder the enemies from carrying out their scheme: “He has cut down in fierce anger all the might of Israel; **He has withdrawn His right hand from them in the face of the enemy**” (אי' ב 3). God does not fight the enemies; rather, He turned His hand back and did not prevent them from harming His people and doing with them as they pleased.[[40]](#footnote-40) God is depicted passively, as one who does not lift a finger for His people. This is also how the Aramaic Targum understood this verse: “אֲתֵיב אָחוֹר יַמִינֵיהּ וְלָא סַיֵיע לְעַמֵיהּ מִן קֳדָם בְּעֵיל דְּבָבָא” (= He turned back His right hand and did not help His people before the enemy). The motif of God’s turning His hand back at the time of the destruction is also mentioned in the lament over the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple (Ps 74:10-11): “How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile your name forever? Why do you hold back your hand; why do you keep your right hand in your bosom?” However, whereas the lamenter in the Psalms justifies his petition because he is concerned for God’s name, which is scorned and reviled by the enemies, the lamenter in Lam 2 is not occupied with God’s name, but rather with His harsh actions toward His people.

* 1. **“He has bent his bow like an enemy, with His right hand set like a foe” (2:4)**

Verse 4 develops the metaphor. Whereas in v. 3 God is portrayed as having acted passively and not having defended His people with His right hand, but rather having allowed the human enemy to do as they wished and harm His people, in v. 4 God’s right hand acts **actively** to harm His people. In place of the human enemy described in the previous verse (3), in this verse, **God Himself** is depicted as adversary and enemy, who bends His bow and seeks to shoot His arrows at His people with His right hand.[[41]](#footnote-41) The depiction of God as a warrior who bends His bow continues in v. 5: “The Lord has become **like an** **enemy**; He has destroyed Israel.” Here, too, we can identify a similar development of the metaphor. Whereas in v. 7 God is depicted as the one who sends the human enemy – “He has delivered into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces” – in v. 5 God Himself is described as the enemy, who harms His people directly, not by means of agents.

* 1. **“He did not withhold His hand from destroying”** (2:8)

Verse 8 further develops the metaphor: “The Lord determined to lay in ruins the wall of daughter Zion; He stretched the line; **He did not withhold His hand from** **destroying.”** God, who had withdrawn His hand from before the enemies and allowed them to strike His people (3), no longer does so. He does not relent from evil but carries out His plan meticulously. The destruction of Zion’s wall is not only the result of an outburst of anger; rather, God coolly planned and calculated to destroy it—He “stretched the line”[[42]](#footnote-42)—and did not withdraw His hand. The prior planning of the wall’s demolition and the precise and exacting execution of the work of destruction impart a character of extreme cruelty.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Tracing the metaphor of the divine hand underscores God’s part in the destruction. God is depicted as the one who was responsible for the destruction, and a gradation can be discerned in the degree of his involvement. Initially, God withdraws His hand, acts passively, and does not help deliver His people from their human enemies; subsequently, however, God is Himself depicted as an enemy fighting against His people and using His right hand to spend His arrows on them. Finally, God is portrayed as one who does not relent from the evil, but fulfills his plan meticulously and with composure, and does not withdraw His right hand.

1. **A direct strike, without an intermediary—the metaphor of fire and arrows in Lam 2 and in the Song of *Ha’azinu* (Deut 32):**

Following our investigation of the fire metaphors and the metaphor of God’s hand, we have seen that this lament underscores the theme that God acted actively at the time of the destruction. Additionally, the harm inflicted upon the people is described both by means of an agent and as God’s direct blow: God is depicted as one who poured out his wrath like fire,[[44]](#footnote-44) and, in addition, He is described as a blazing fire. God is portrayed as one who sent the human enemy to strike His people, and, in addition, is Himself depicted as an enemy who shoots arrows at His people.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Harm by means of an agent | Direct harm |
| Fire metaphor | “In the tent of daughter Zion; He has poured out His wrath **like** **fire**” (4) | “At the approach of the enemy He has burned **like a flaming** **fire** in Jacob, consuming all around” (3) |
| Enemy metaphor  who shoots his arrows | “He has delivered into the hand of **the enemy** the walls of her palaces” (7) | He has bent his bow like an enemy, with His right hand set like a **foe**” (5) |

It is fascinating to note that these two metaphors, fire and arrows, also appear in the Song of *Ha’azinu*. In both cases they appear in proximity: First God is depicted as a blazing fire that consumes its surroundings, and immediately thereafter, He is depicted as a warrior who shoots His arrows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Lam 2 | Song of *Ha’azinu* (Deut 32) |
| “He has burned like a flaming **fire** in Jacob, **consuming** all around” (3) | “For a **fire** is kindled by My anger, and burns to the depths of Sheol; it **devours** the earth and its increase, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains” (22) |
| “**He has bent His bow** like an enemy, with His right hand set like a foe” (4) | “I will heap disasters upon them, **spend My arrows against them” (23)** |

The author of Lam 2 seems to create a connection to the Song of Ha’azinu. We can infer this from the strong similarity between the metaphors. Additionally, both of these sources use metaphors of fire and arrows to express that it was God’s blow that harmed His people, not their enemies. Moreover, in both places, the harm is described as God’s **direct** blow against His people, without an agent.

The combination of these two metaphors presents two types of harm (and it is difficult to decide which of them is more severe). Whereas fire depicts an unplanned, perhaps even uncontrollable, outburst of anger, like the flare-up of a fire in a field of thorns, whose boundaries cannot be predicted in advance, the metaphor of the warrior shooting his arrows at his enemy depicts a precise, planned, and deliberate strike.

1. **The conclusion of the lament – a double ambiguity:**

Through an analysis of the metaphors in the lament and the elucidation of its structure, we have identified the theological message that emerges from this lament. The lament emphasizes God’s role in the destruction and presents Him as one who acted actively and directly to strike His own people. This lament does not call for acquiescence to God’s way or for penitence; rather, it encourages an honest prayer to God, pouring out one’s heart like water in anger – and even in defiance. This theological message is hard to digest, leading the author to blur it by employing a double and deliberate ambiguity:

(22) You called my enemies from all around as if for a day of festival

and on the day of the anger of the Lord no one escaped or survived

those whom I bore and reared my enemy has destroyed.

The question of how to conclude a poem, a lament, or a book is significant and essential. Humans tend to end on an optimistic note. This tendency can be discerned in the practice of reading the books of Scripture. When reading books or scrolls whose ending is negative, Jews customarily conclude with a tempering and calming verse.[[45]](#footnote-45) Thus, for example, the scroll of Lamentations ends with the harsh words: “Unless you have utterly rejected us, and are angry with us beyond measure” (5:22), as a condition without an apodosis, a kind of broken utterance, as if the mourner had run out of words.[[46]](#footnote-46) Consequently, Jewish communities, during the reading of Lamentations on Tisha b’Av in synagogues, customarily add and repeat the consoling words of the penultimate verse: “Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old” (5:21). Since each of the five laments in Lamentations stands as a composition in its own right, we must also examine how each of them ends specifically. As we have seen, Lam 2 expresses an unusual and exceptional theological posture of defiance toward God, and therefore, the question of how this lament will conclude is of particular importance. Will it end in the same tone of anger and defiance that is present throughout, or can one discern at its conclusion a note of acceptance or consolation?

The final verse seems to contain a double ambiguity that creates deliberate equivocation. I believe that since concluding the lament in a tone of defiance is particularly bold, the author chose to soften and disguise this by means of ambiguity.

* 1. **Ambiguity 1: “My enemy has destroyed them”—who is the enemy?**

The lament concludes with the charged words “Those whom I bore and reared my enemy has destroyed.” Daughter Zion depicts the enemy as the one who annihilated (that is, killed) her children, whom she nurtured and raised.[[47]](#footnote-47) Various scholars have noted that one can discern an ambiguity concerning the word “my enemy.”[[48]](#footnote-48) It can be argued that it refers to the human enemy, mentioned four times in this lament (vv. 3, 7, 16, 17); according to this reading, Daughter Zion is speaking of the human enemies who executed the divine decree. However, in this lament, the designation “enemy” can also be understood as referring to God, given its unique theology. We read: “The Lord has become like an enemy; He has destroyed Israel” (5), and God is described as bending His bow like an enemy and directing His arrows against His people (4). According to this reading, the lament ends on a sharply defiant note, which, were it not actually stated, would be inconceivable. Daughter Zion accuses God of being her enemy, who annihilated the children whom she raised and cared for.

* 1. **Ambiguity 2: Who is the injured party? Israel or the nations?**

Beyond this ambiguity, I wish to point to another ambiguity that appears at the beginning of the verse and has not yet received attention.

(22) You called (lit., “You will call”) my enemies from all around as if for a day of festival

and on the day of the Lord’s anger no one escaped or survived.

This verse can be read in two different ways. First, we must consider whether it describes an event that has already occurred or one that is yet to come. On the one hand, in the first clause the verb “תִּקְרָא” (“You will call”) appears in the future tense; on the other, the second part of the verse is worded in the past tense. This question connects to another: Of whom did no remnant and survivor remain— the nations, or the people of Israel? The term “the day of the Lord’s anger” recurs frequently in the prophets and depicts total destruction directed against the nations.[[49]](#footnote-49) Is this calamity directed against the nations being described here as well, a kind of future retribution for their harm to Judah, or is the familiar term being used here with its meaning inverted, so that what is being described is precisely the harm that was inflicted on Israel in the past, during the destruction?[[50]](#footnote-50)

Rashi already noted that the verb “*tiqra’*” (“You will call”) should be read in the past tense as “*qara’t*” (“You have called”). The reason for this is apparently connected to the constraints of the acrostic: The rigid rules require that the last verse of the lament open with the letter *tav*, and therefore, the author replaced the past form with the future. According to this reading, the verse concerns the past and describes what happened to the people of Israel: At the time of the destruction, God called all Israel’s enemies[[51]](#footnote-51) to assemble around Him as on a festival and slaughter His people so completely that none of them remained, survivor or fugitive. Most exegetes [[52]](#footnote-52)and scholars have read this verse this way.[[53]](#footnote-53)

However, alongside this reading, the verse can also be read as concerning God’s future vengeance upon the nations. According to this reading, the verse should be read in the future tense: God will call them on the day of His anger and will take vengeance upon them so utterly that none of them will remain, fugitive or survivor. Thus, for example, Zakovitch interpreted this verse: “Not everyone died in Jerusalem, but she expects that ‘on the day of the Lord’s anger,’ the day of vengeance upon the enemies, corresponding to the expression that opens the lament ‘the day of His anger’ (v. 1), none of her enemies will remain, survivor or fugitive.”[[54]](#footnote-54)

Thus, one may argue that the verse contains a double ambiguity, regarding both the identity of the victims (are they the people of Israel, or the nations?) and that of the assailing enemy (is it the human enemy, or perhaps God?). It appears that the lament concludes in a trenchant tone of anger and protest directed toward God in the wake of Him striking His people at the time of the destruction. The lament’s conclusion, with reference to “the day of the Lord’s anger” (22), just as it opened with “the day of His anger” (1), creates an inclusio. Anger and protest frame the lament on both sides and are interwoven throughout. And yet, concluding the lament in anger and protest is hard to digest. The human need to end on an optimistic note is so strong that the lament’s composer resorted to blurring this harsh message by employing a double ambiguity.

**In conclusion**

Contrary to scholars who hold that in Lam 2 there is no place for prayer,[[55]](#footnote-55) I maintain that prayer occupies a central place in this lament. However, unlike other laments in the book of Lamentations, this is not a prayer of praise to God and vindication of his way, nor a prayer that includes a confession of sin or a call to repent. The lament in Lam 2 presents a distinctive and unique theological concept, according to which there is room for protest and for candid speech with God while pouring out one’s heart like water. Moreover, in this lament, the pouring out of the heart is presented as the only consolation that can be offered in the face of ruin as vast as the sea. This theological message emerges from an analysis of the metaphors of fire, water, and the hand of God, from the identification of a “three and four” structure, and from a discussion of the wording of v. 18.

Various scholars have noted that the function of metaphor is not merely to ornament the work but to advance and refine the central argument, no less than any other textual element.[[56]](#footnote-56) By analyzing the fire-and-water metaphor, I have shown that the theological message that emerges from this lament is that there is room for defiance and candid speech with God, accompanied by pouring out one’s heart before Him. Whereas God is portrayed in the lament through the metaphor of fire, Daughter Zion is depicted by images associated with water. The efficacy of water is manifest in its power to extinguish the blazing fire. Thus Daughter Zion’s prayer—she pours out her heart like the sea and cries out in anger for the life of her children—is presented as the only solution the lament offers for extinguishing the divine conflagration.

This message also emerges from pointing to the lament’s structure. The “three and four” structure underscores the contrast between the three human agents (the prophets, passersby, and enemies), who will not be able to remedy Daughter Zion’s pain, which is as great as the sea, and the fourth response, which calls for a direct appeal to God by pouring out the heart like water before Him. Our discussion of v. 18 demonstrated that this lament counsels Daughter Zion to cry out in anger and to pour out her heart before God, and thus perhaps obtain a measure of relief for her pain. Anger and defiance are interwoven throughout the entire lament, and, accordingly, it concludes with a harsh and trenchant statement. This message is so hard to accept that the lamenter sought to blur and soften it by means of a double ambiguity.

1. Research on metaphors tends to emphasize their cognitive functions. Cognitive researchers regard the phenomenon of metaphor as a key to understanding the cognitive activity of language users. In their view, metaphor is a cognitive process, a conceptual phenomenon of transferring structure from one domain to another. Delving into the phenomenon of metaphor thus reveals the mindset of language users. Cognitive linguistics offers theoretical foundations and analytical tools for examining this matter. See, for example: E. R. MacCormac, *A Cognitive Theory of Metaphor*, Cambridge, 1985. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. G. G. Lakoff and Mark Johnso*n, Metaphors We Live* By (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); Lakoff and M. G. Lakof*f and M. Turner, More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide t*o Poetic Metaphor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Biblical scholars have applied insights from cognitive linguistics when analyzing biblical literature. See, for example: E. J. van Wolde, "Wisdom, Who Can Find It? A Non-Cognitive and Cognitive Study of Job 28:1-11," in *Job 28: Cognition in Context*, pp. 1-35; E. L. Greenstein, "The Poem on Wisdom in Job 28 and its Conceptual and Literary Contexts," in: *Job 28: Cognition in Context,* pp. 253-280;; A. Kamps, Inner Worlds: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach to the Book of Jonah (tr. D. Orton; BIS 68; Leiden, 2004); J. Jindo, "Toward a poetics of the biblical mind: Language, culture, and cognition", *Vetus Testamentum* *59*(2), (2009), pp. 222-243. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. E. L. Greenstein, "Some Metaphors in the Poetry of Job," in: Built by Wisdom, Established by Understanding: Essays on Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of Adele Berlin (ed. Maxine L. Grossman; Bethesda, MD: University of Maryland Press, 2013), 179-95 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This stands in contrast to claims that are still heard in scholarship to this day, according to which the book of Lamentations is nothing but “a jumble of images bubbling to the surface in random order.” J. Middlemas, *Lamentations: an introduction and study guide*, (T&T Clark study guides to the Old Testament), New York, 2021, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The prevailing view is that the second and fourth laments, which depict destruction and famine in vivid images and share many points of similarity, were composed close to the time of the destruction by the same author. Shortly thereafter, the first lament was composed; it portrays the disaster in a more restrained manner and from a more distant perspective. The third lament, a personal lament over suffering endured, contains no specific reference to the destruction but rather general reflections on the ways of providence, and was composed later on, whereas the fifth lament, which describes the people’s prolonged suffering under Babylonian occupation and concludes with a prayer for redemption, was composed last (See, for example, קליין, איכה, p. 9). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Some scholars argue that the lament in chapter 3 reflects the voice of a single speaker. See, for example: דובס אלסופ, איכה, עמ' 94-91; הילרס, איכה, עמ' 123-122; רנמקה, איכה, עמ' 351-349. J. Renkema, Lamentations (Historical commentary on the Old Testament), Peeters-Leuven, 1998, p. 349-351 However, in line with many scholars, I believe that it is possible to identify the voices of different speakers in this chapter. The first part of the lament (1–20) is stated in a defiant voice, like Job’s. This stands in contrast to the second part of the lament (43–47), which reflects a voice that accepts God’s way, similar to the voice of Job’s friends. For scholars who identify different voices in Lam 3 see: גורדיס, איכה, עמ' 155, 175; ברלין, איכה, עמ' 85, 96-95,; גרינשטיין, קול האישה, עמ' 170. R. Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations,* New York, 1974. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Linafelt argued that many biblical scholars tend to interpret Lamentations as a means of reconciliation with God rather than as a tool for engagement and struggle with God. According to his concept, this is one of the biases that led many scholars to claim that the heart of Lamentations lies at its center, in chapter 3. In addition to this reason, Linafelt listed two further reasons for the scholars’ biases: First, he argued that scholars (mostly men) preferred to emphasize the male voice situated at the center of the book—“I am the man who has seen affliction” (Lam 3:1)—over the female voice found in the other laments. Additionally, he argued that scholars (mostly Christian) preferred to foreground the voice of the suffering righteous, because they identified this voice with that of Jesus. By contrast, he argued that Lam 1–2 should be seen as the rhetoric of survival literature. The survivor’s aim, by contrast with the theologian’s, is to bear witness to pain rather than to find meaning in it. For the survivor, pain is not meaningful but rather senseless. See: T. Linafelt, “Zion's Cause: The Presentation of Pain in the Book of Lamentations” in: T. Linafelt (ed.), *Strange Fire: Reading the Bible after the Holocaust* (New York, 2000), pp. 267-279. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Hillers, for example, argues that in this lament Jerusalem is presented as having sinned, yet “the conquest itself brought with it horrific, extreme suffering, which appeared to those involved to be disproportionate to the sufferers’ guilt” (הילרס, איכה, עמ' 108). Emphasizing the idea of sin and its punishment in the book of Lamentations is connected to a broader trend that characterized the spirit of classical scholarship up to the 1980s. Many scholars tended to interpret Lamentations’ theology paradigmatically, along the lines of the theology of Deuteronomy. The destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and the great suffering it entailed were explained as punishment for the sin of the people of Judah and Jerusalem. God grew angry and, as a result, vented His anger upon Jerusalem and Judah. From this perspective, God’s venting of anger is presented as a just punishment for Judah’s sin. See: C. Westermann, *Lamentation issues and interpretation*, Edinburgh 1994, pp. 76-81 (The Theology Significance of Lamentation in Prior Research) A turning point in research on Lamentations was the publication of Moore’s 1983 article, in which he argued that the purpose of the laments in Lamentations is not theological, but rather to give expression to the people’s suffering and pain in the face of the horrors of the destruction. M. S. Moore, “Human Suffering in Lamentation,” *RB* 90 (1983), pp. 534-555. Building on this, Dobbs Allsopp argued that although there is an acknowledgment of sin in Lamentations, the laments also profoundly engage with the problem of evil. The book of Lamentations presents an immense human tragedy and exposes the dark side of existence. F. W. Dobbs – Allsopp, “Tragedy, Tradition and Theology in the Book of Lamentations,” *JSOT* 74 (1997), pp. 29-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. A. Berlin, *Lamentations* (OTL), 2002, p. 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Thus, for example, Brandscheidt contends that Lam 2 describes a state of rupture between God and His people, and that consequently a Deuteronomistic editor added the third lament (Lam 3) to correct the theology that emerges in the second lament and present an alternative in the third. See: R. Brandscheidt, *Gotteszorn und Menschenleid: Die Gerichtsklage des leidenden Gerechten in Klgl 3* (Trier Theologische Studien 41) Trier 1983, pp. 344-352. In my opinion, this claim is difficult to accept, since it is difficult to attribute the two parts of Lam 3 to the same editor. The first part of Lam 3:1–20 reflects a theological conception entirely different from that which emerges from its second part. The theological conception reflected in the first part of Lam 3 is, rather, similar to Lam 2. See, for example: Lam 3:10, 12–13. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. א' עסיס, איכה מייאוש לתפילה, אלון שבות 2020, עמ' 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Although elsewhere in the Bible, when the temple is called a tent it is attributed to God (see, for example, Ps 15:1, 27:5); consequently, some have proposed that the tent of Daughter Zion is a collective designation for the tents of Judah (Num 24:5; ???30:18). See, for example, ברלין, איכה, עמ' 69; קליין, איכה, עמ' 144). However, in this lament additional epithets for the temple are mentioned, such as: “the glory of Israel,” “His footstool” (1), and therefore it seems that it refers to the temple. (זקוביץ, איכה, עמ' 82). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For these terms and additional examples of their usage, see, for example: J. J. Jindo, “Toward a poetics of the biblical mind: Language, culture, and cognition,” *Vetus Testamen*t*um* 59(2), (2009), pp. 226-227, 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. According to the Masoretic accentuation, the words "אש להבה" (“a flaming fire”) should be regarded as a single expression. This division is also reflected in the Septuagint. However, according to this division, the clause in second part of the verse lacks a subject. Perhaps this verse should be divided after the word "כאש" (“like fire”), thereby producing a parallelism. God blazed like fire, and as a result—the fire devoured and consumed its surroundings. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. In other places in the Bible, God is depicted by means of the image of fire. See, for example, Isa 10:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Another solution to the theological difficulty can be identified in Ibn Ezra’s interpretation, which indeed clarifies that we are dealing with an intransitive verb, but, in his view, this verb “returns to the burning of anger” (ראב"ע, איכה ב, ג, דקדוק מילים). That is, in his view, the subject of the clause is not God but the wrath of His anger mentioned at the beginning. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. J. Jindo, “Toward a poetics of the biblical mind: Language, culture, and cognition,” *Vetus Testamentum* 59(2), (2009), p. 228. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. דובס אלסופ, איכה, עמ' 97-96; ברלין, איכה, עמ' 73. F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentation Interpretation (A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching)*,Louisville 2002, pp. 96-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Clapping the hands in the Bible signifies anger or disappointment (see Balak’s reaction in Num 24:10). However, here it appears to be an action associated with mockery, as in Job 27:23: “It claps its hands at him, and hisses at him from its place.” As in Lam 2, Job also features the pairing of the two actions, clapping the hands and hissing. The act of opening the mouth is associated with threat; see, for example: “They open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion” (Ps 22:14). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. These two actions, head-wagging and gnashing of teeth, convey a similar message connected with derision. See: “All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads” (Ps 22:8); “They impiously mock more and more, gnashing at me with their teeth” (Ps 35:16); and see also מל [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. This rhetorical question, “Is **this** the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth?” expresses the profound shattering of the city of Jerusalem, to the point that one can hardly believe that this is the splendid city it once was. This recalls the question “Is **this** Naomi?” (Ruth 1:19), asked about Naomi upon her return to Bethlehem. Both questions emphasize the gap between the glorious past of the woman or the city and the crisis-ridden reality of the present. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. A similar proposal has been advanced by Dobbs Allsopp, who likewise identifies the lamenter’s proposal to address God directly as a fourth response, following the rejection of the three prior comforters-healers. However, Dobbs Allsopp regards v. 17 as the verse that proposes the fourth candidate. According to his reading, this verse is spoken by the lamenting narrator and is not a quotation of the enemies’ words. Consequently, he argues that God appears to have much in common with the previous three candidates. God is not portrayed as a sympathetic figure, for He is the one who caused Zion’s suffering to begin with. This reading raises a substantive difficulty: If the lamenter seeks to encourage Daughter Zion to direct her outcry to God, why does he first mention God’s harsh deeds, who destroyed and did not show compassion (v. 17)? My proposal resolves this difficulty. I view v. 17 as part of the enemies’ words, whereas the lamenter’s proposal to address God directly begins in v. 18. (ראו: דובס-אלסופ, איכה, עמ' 98-97). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. י' **זקוביץ, על שלושה ועל ארבעה : הדגם הספרותי שלושה-ארבעה במקרא, ירושלים** תשל"ט**.** [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. רנמקה, איכה, עמ' 308 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. We also find the collocation cry + heart in Hos 7:14:”They do not cry to me from the heart.” [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Heinrich Ewald suggested this already in 1866. See: H. Ewald, *Die Psalmen und die Klaglieder erklärt* (Die Dichter des Alten Bundes erklärt 1:2)3. ausg. Göttingen 1866, p. 335. Most scholars accept this proposal. See, for example: גורדיס, שיר השירים ואיכה, עמ' 167-166; הילרס, איכה, עמ' 101; אלברקטסון, איכה, עמ' 117-116. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Scholars offered many emendments for the word “their heart,” such as: “to you,” “your voice,” “against them,” “to you, fullness.” However, it is methodologically difficult to accept these proposals, since textual corruptions often arise when a scribe does not correctly identify a rare word and replaces it with a common one. According to Albrektson, the textual corruption occurred when the scribe failed to recognize the rare word (“*libbah*,” in the sense of anger) and replaced it with a common word (*lev*, “heart”). See: B. Albrektson, *Studies in the Text and Theology of Lamentation*, Lund 1963, pp. 116-117. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. On the basis of familiarity with the Akkadian word libbātu (meaning anger), Driver already in 1928 proposed that the verse “What shall I fill with anger against you” should be understood as, How shall I be filled with anger against you.” See: G. E. Driver, 'Some Hebrew Words', *Journal Theological Studies* *29* (116),(1928), pp. 390-396.‏(393) and see also the entry לִבָּה, BDB. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The wall of Daughter Zion is a synecdoche for Zion as a whole and was a prominent site for the recitation of laments in antiquity. See: דובס אלסופ, איכה, עמ' 98. ראו לדוגמה בקינה על העיר אור : "חומת אכר, מה מרה הקינה, הקינה אשר ישאו עליך" (שורה 53)... וכן פנייה לחומת ארכג (שורה 56), חומת אסן (שורה 59), חומת ארך (שורה 61), חומת ארדו (שורה 62) (שפרה וקליין, הימים הרחוקים, עמ' 429). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. I argue this in contrast to Dobbs Allsopp. According to his proposal, Daughter Zion does indeed address God directly as she was urged to do, but instead of pleading with God she is defiant. By contrast, I contend that Daughter Zion does precisely what the lamenter recommended: to pour out her heart directly before God and to speak with Him candidly about the injustice that has been done, for the life of her children. דובס אלסופ, איכה, עמ' 79-78 : “Zion does address God, but not in the plaintive and petitionary tones suggested. Rather, her own speech (2:20–22) is more challenging, even accusatory, than anything else.” [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. רנמקה, איכה, עמ' 319; דובס-אלסופ, איכה, עמ' 99; גרינשטיין, כעס, עמ' 38-37; האוס, איכה, עמ' 394. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See, for example: “Enlil reversed the (fate of) my house, smashed it with axes; he who came upon me from the south hurled fire upon it—alas, my city is ruined, laid waste upon me; he who came upon me from the north, Enlil cast a flame upon it” (lines 260–258), pp. 437–436. ADD A REFERENCE TO NILI’S ARTICLE [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. M. W. Green, “The Eridu Lament,” *JCS* 30 (1978), pp.127-167. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Sh. Shifra, Y. Klein, *In Distant Days – An Anthology of Ancient Near Eastern Poetry*, Tel Aviv 1998, p. 436. And see also lines 377–373 (p. 441). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. E. Greenstein, “The wrath at God in the book of Lamentations,” H. G. Reventlow and Y. Hoffman (eds.), *The problem of evil and its symbols in Jewish and Christian tradition,* New York 2004, pp. 29-42.(39-40). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. “At that time the Holy One, blessed be He, wept and said: What have I done, that I caused My Presence to dwell for Israel, and now that they have sinned I have returned to the first place; God forbid that I should be a laughingstock to those who speak and a mockery to creatures... He said to the ministering angels: Come, let us go, I and you, and see what the enemies have done. Immediately the Holy One, blessed be He, and the ministering angels went, and Jeremiah before Him. When He saw the Temple, He said: Surely this was My house, and this was My resting place; the enemies came there and did as they pleased. At that time He was crying out and weeping, and saying: My children, where are they? My priests and Levites, where are they? My nobles, where are they? And what shall I do? How many times did I warn you to repent, and you did not.” (Midrash Zuta - Lamentations [Buber] parashah 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. This feminine role recalls the role of the benevolent spirits called the Daughters of Anu. They are mentioned in Babylonian incantations intended for medical purposes, such as the prevention of skin diseases and eye diseases, and are described as bearing water meant to alleviate pain, functioning, in Farber’s words, as a kind of “fire brigade of the divine fire.” W. Farber, “Mannam lušpur ana Enkidu: Some New Thoughts about an Old Motif,” *JNES* (1990) pp. 299-321(302). In 1955 these incantations were collected and published together with philological commentary. See: B. Landsberger, Th. Jacobsen, “An Old Babylonian Charm against Merḫu,”, *JNES* 14 (1955), pp.14-21; A. Goetze, “An Incantation Against Disease,” *JCS* 9 (1955), pp. 14-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. See the mention of the mourning women who raise a lament and shed tears in Jer 9:16–19. These women also teach this craft to their daughters and transmit it from mother to daughter. Ugaritic literature mentions mourning women who weep over the hero Aqhat. Tablet 3, column d, lines 9–11, 20–22 (CAT 1.19 iv 9–11, 20–22 (see: ש' נתן -יולזרי, \*עלילת אקהת: שירת עלילה קדומה מאוגרית\* (הסדרה לחקר המקרא), תל אביב 2015, עמ' 109-108. Rashbam, in his preface to Lamentations, describes this practice of employing mourning women in his day. See: S. Japhet, “Rashbam's Introduction to His Commentary on Lamentations,” Shnaton 19 (2009), pp. 243–231. See: ש' יפת, "הקדמת רשב. ם לפירושו למגילת איכה", שנתון יט (תשס. ט), עמ' 243-231. A. Brenner and F. van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible*, Leiden 1996, pp. 29-87. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Hillers argued that the “right hand” is Israel’s, as mentioned a few words earlier. That is, God turned back Israel’s right hand and thus prevented them from fighting the enemy. See: D. R. Hillers, *Lamentations* (AB), Garden City, NY 1992, p. 98.. However, it seems preferable to understand the word “His right hand” as referring to God’s hand. The expression “right hand” in the sense of military force appears in the Bible only once with reference to a foreign people (Ps 89:43) and not even once with reference to Israel as a people. By contrast, the use of the word “His right hand” to designate God’s power is common in the Bible. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. We can learn about holding the bow in the left hand and the arrows in the right from Ezekiel’s prophecy concerning Gog and Magog: “Then I will strike your bow from your left hand, and will make your arrows drop out of your right hand” (Ezek 39:3), as well as from the wall reliefs of the siege of Lachish, in which archers from the Assyrian army are depicted stringing their bows, in the palace of King Sennacherib in Nineveh (701 BCE). See: י' קליין, **איכה (מקרא ל**ישראל), תל אביב תשע. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. The line is the cord that builders use to align a course of stones. The line and the plumb line are used not only to describe construction (Zach 1:16) but also to describe demolition. The destroyer uses measuring instruments to level the ground so as to erase every trace of the building that once stood there (2Kgs 21:13). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. See also v. 17 in this lament. י' קליין, **איכה** (מקרא לישראל), תל אביב תשע"ז, עמ' 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. God is depicted as having poured out His wrath like fire. Wrath is thus portrayed as God’s agent for executing the calamity. This is like the depiction in the Song of the Sea, where God is described as sending forth his fury to strike His enemies: “In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew your adversaries**; you sent out your fury**; it consumed them like stubble” (Ex 15:7). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. At the conclusion of reading Isaiah, the Twelve Prophets, Ecclesiastes, and Lamentations, it is customary to repeat the verse before the last in order to end on an optimistic note. Thus, for example, the last chapter in the Twelve (Mal 3) which is read as the *haftarah* of *Shabbat ha-Gadol*, ends with the threatening words: “So that I will not come and strike the land with a curse” (Mal 3:24). To end the book on a positive note, it is customary to repeat the penultimate verse: “Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah” (Mal. 3:23). על מנהג קריאה זה ראו: י"ש שפיגל, "מנהג הקריאה המתיחס לסימן יתק"ק", ד' רפל (עורך), מחקרים במקרא ובחינוך מוגשים לפרופ' משה ארנד, ירושלים תשנ"ו, עמ' 187-171. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. T. Linafelt, “The Refusal of a Conclusion in the Book of Lamentations,” *JBL* 120.2 (2001) pp. 340-343.‏ [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. “*Ribbiti*” in the sense of “I reared”; see, for example: “What a lioness was your mother! Among lions she crouched; in the midst of young lions she reared her cubs” (Ezek 19:2). Under the influence of Aramaic (for example, Dan 4:8, 17, 30) R. Joseph understood the pair of verbs “*tippaḥti ve-ribbiti*” as a repetition: “Both are one and the same expression, like ‘I reared children and brought them up’ (Isa 1:2), both of which are the same expression.” (ר' יוסף קרא, איכה ב כב, נוסח שני) [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. קליין, עמ' 164; דובס אלסופ, עמ' 102; Renkema argues that the use of the singular form hints that it is God, whose name she fears to mention (רנמקה, איכה, עמ' 330) . [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Isa 2:12-22, 13:1-22; Ezek 7:1-27, 13:11-14, 30:1-19; Joel 1:13-20; Zeph 1:2-18; Kgs 3:19-21; 2; and more. For further discussion, see: נ' סמט, "למקורותיה של מסורת יום ה'", **שנתון לחקר המקרא והמזרח הקדום** (2022), עמ' 230-187. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. An inverted use of the well-known term “the day of the Lord’s anger” can already be identified prior to the scroll of Lamentations, in the prophecy of Amos (5:18-20). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Regarding the word “*megurai*,” some have interpreted it from the root g-w-r, that is, “my neighbors who dwell around me” (Rashi, Joseph Qaspi, Ibn Ezra, Ewald); others have interpreted it from *magor*—fear, terror (Saadiah Gaon, and most modern commentators). This term most often appears in the frequent collocation found in Jeremiah, “*magor misaviv*.” However, whether we interpret it one way or the other, this verse deals with enemies. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. So understood Rashi, Ibn Ezra, R. Joseph Qaspi, Isaiah of Trani. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. So too most moderns. See, for example: וסטרמן, איכה, עמ' 159; [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Thus, for example, R. Joseph Kara interpreted: “You call as on a festival my terrors all around—you call a festival to shatter the nations for whom I had been a terror all around (according to Jer 20:3), as on a festival that you proclaimed ‘against me to crush my young men’ (Lamentations 1:15).” **(in his commentary to Lam 2:22).** Thus, too, Zakovitch interpreted in his commentary: “Not everyone died in Jerusalem, but she expects that ‘on the day of the Lord’s anger,’ the day of vengeance upon the enemies, corresponding to the expression that opens the lament ‘the day of His anger’ (v. 1), none of her enemies—her terrors will remain, survivor or fugitive.” זקוביץ ושנאן, איכה, עמ' 118; הילרס, איכה, 108; קליין טוען כי יש לקרוא את הפועל “תקרא” כקראת, אך כותב כי: “קינה זו, בדומה לקינות הראשונה, השלישית והרביעית חותמת בבקשה לנקמה באויבים” (קליין, איכה, עמ' 163). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. ברלין, איכה, עמ' 77; עסיס, איכה, עמ' 95; ברנשידט, איכה ג, עמ' 344-352 [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. See above, footnote 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)