YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***Tehillim* (Series II)**

**Rav Elchanan Samet**

**Shiur #06: Psalm 113 - “Give Praise, O Servants of the Lord,**

**Praise the Name of the Lord”**

**The First Psalm of Hallel[[1]](#footnote-1)\***

R. Yochanan said: Wherever you find [mentioned in the Scriptures] the power of the Holy One, blessed be He, you also find his gentleness mentioned. This fact is stated in the Torah, repeated in the Prophets, and stated a third time in the [Sacred] Writings….[[2]](#footnote-2) (*Megilla* 31a)

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| 1. Halleluya!
 |
| I | Give praise, O servants of the Lord,praise the name of the Lord. | V  | (5) Who is like the Lord our God,who is enthroned on high,(6) and yet looks far down to beholdthe things that are in heaven, and on the earth! |
| II  | (2) Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth, and for evermore. | VI | (7) He raises up the poor out of the dust,And lifts the needy out of the ashheap;(8) That He may set him with nobles,with the nobles of his people. |
| III | (3) From the rising of the sun to its setting,the Lord's name is to be praised. | VII | (9) He makes the barren woman to keep house,And be a joyful mother of children. |
| IV | (4) The Lord is high above all nations,And His glory is above the heavens. |  |  |
| Halleluya! |

### I. The literary category of our psalm and its uniqueness within that category

 Psalm 113 is a psalm of praise,[[3]](#footnote-3) and it comes as no surprise that it opens the set of the six psalms of *Hallel*.[[4]](#footnote-4) Like many of the psalms of praise in the book of *Tehillim*, this psalm opens with an appeal to those present to praise God:[[5]](#footnote-5)

Give praise, O servants of the Lord/

praise the name of the Lord.

 However, in contrast to the other psalms of praise that open with a similar appeal, in our psalm the psalmist does not continue with a rationale for the appeal made at the beginning of the psalm ("for…"). Rather he immediately **cites the response of the addressees** of his appeal. The rest of the psalm (verses 2-9) informs us of the words of praise with which the servants of God praise Him, in response to the psalmist's appeal to them at the beginning of the psalm. This is already evident in verse 2: "Blessed be (*yehi*) the name of the Lord…." These words are not a continuation of the appeal in verse 1, but rather the words of the servants of God who praise and bless God as they have been called upon to do.[[6]](#footnote-6) The word *yehi* is an imperative form that in many cases expresses the wish of a person engaged in prayer.[[7]](#footnote-7)

 That which follows is also the praise sounded by the servants of God, all the way until the end of the psalm. Verse 5 proves that the speakers in the psalm are the servants of God who had been called upon to praise Him, speaking in the first person plural: "Who is like the Lord **our** God."

 It is rare to find the response of those called upon to praise God in the psalms of praise of the type under discussion here.[[8]](#footnote-8) But a psalm of praise consisting of only a short appeal at the beginning, followed by a long citation of the response of the addressees until the end of the psalm, is an entirely unique phenomenon that requires clarification.

 Understanding the uniqueness of our psalm is rooted in the identity of the addressees of the appeal made at the beginning of the psalm. The addressees are "the servants of the Lord" – His faithful followers, who dedicate their lives to His service. The psalmist who calls upon them to praise God certainly belongs to that group. They do not need a detailed rationale explaining why it falls upon them to praise God, and they also know on their own how they are to praise Him. Therefore, the psalm moves directly from the short and minimalist appeal to them to praise God to the words of praise in their mouths. These words substitute for the rationale sounded by the psalmist that is generally found in the other psalms of praise.[[9]](#footnote-9)

 If we wish to find a psalm of praise in the book of *Tehillim* that is similar in this respect to our psalm, it is precisely a psalm in which the psalmist calls upon **himself** with a short appeal to praise God, and then immediately executes this self-invitation with broad and detailed praise. Thus, for example, Psalm 104:

1. Bless the Lord, O my soul!

O Lord my God, You are very great/

You are clothed with glory and majesty.

 Another example is Psalm 146:

1. Praise the Lord, O my soul!
2. While I live I will praise the Lord/

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

The psalmist's role in our psalm is like that of the prayer leader of later generations. At the beginning of the communal prayer service in the morning and in the evening, the prayer leader opens with an appeal to the congregation: "Bless you the Lord who is to be blessed." The congregation responds and says: "Blessed is the Lord, who is to be blessed forever and ever" (just like the servants of the Lord in our psalm, who respond to the appeal addressed to them: "Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and for evermore"). From this point on, the congregation continues to bless God independently, with long and full blessings (like the servants of the Lord in our psalm), while the role of the prayer leader is very limited.

This is not the situation with respect to most of the psalms of praise that open with an appeal to those present to praise God. In these psalms, the psalmist's role in relation to his addressees is not limited exclusively to the role of prayer leader. After calling upon them to praise God, his role is to mediate between the audience to whom he had turned and God, the object of the praise. In a significant portion of such psalms, the psalmist turns to all the nations. However, even in those in which he turns to his own people, his addressees need his guidance regarding **how** they must praise God[[10]](#footnote-10) and what the rationale is for praising God. (In certain cases, this rationale becomes the content of the praise in the people's mouths, and for this reason the psalmist does not report to us the response to his appeal).

Already at this stage, then, we can begin to identify the uniqueness of our psalm and how it differs from all other psalms of its type.[[11]](#footnote-11) Later in this study, we will try to understand the unique content of the praise in our psalm. What are the grounds for the praise expressed in our psalm? For which of God's attributes or for which of His actions is He being praised?

### II. THe turning point in our psalm[[12]](#footnote-12)

 In the previous section, we demonstrated that the praise framework of our psalm consists of a short invitation extended to the servants of God to praise Him in stanza I, and their response to this appeal that extends over stanzas II-VII, the rest of the psalm. This, however, does not provide a picture of the structure of the psalm with respect to its content and style. Exposing the structure of the psalm is what will bring us closer, more than anything else, to the idea and theme of the psalm as a whole.

 What then is the structure of our psalm?

 The first stage in uncovering the structure of the psalm involves transcribing it as a poem, divided into stanzas. In the transcription at the beginning of our study, we divided it into seven stanzas.[[13]](#footnote-13) The first four stanzas are two lines each (each stanza consisting of one verse), and all of them are made up of a similar number of words – seven or eight words in each stanza. Stanzas V and VI are four lines each (each stanza consisting of two verses), and stanza VII goes back to two lines (and one verse).[[14]](#footnote-14)

Is it possible to identify in the psalm a point at which there is a change in atmosphere? A change discovered in the succession of praises expressed by the servants of God over the entire course of the psalm is likely to hint at a division of the psalm into two halves, as is common in many psalms.

In fact, at the beginning of stanza V (verse 5), there is an allusion to a slight but decisive change in the atmosphere of the psalm. God is called by His servants who praise Him by a term denoting belonging and closeness: "The Lord **our** God." This is a change from the governing atmosphere in stanzas II-IV, as will be explained below.

Until stanza IV, the words of praise emphasize God's absolute power in all of the dimensions of reality comprehended by man:

**In stanza II** – in the dimension of time: "Blessed be the name of the Lord **from** this time forth **and for** evermore."

**In stanza III** – in the dimension of horizontal space: "**From** the rising of the sun **to** its setting, the Lord's name is to be praised."[[15]](#footnote-15)

**In stanza IV** – in the dimension of vertical space: "The Lord is high above all nations, and His glory is above the heavens."[[16]](#footnote-16)

These three expressions of power emphasize God's distance from His world. This is expressed in two ways.

First of all, God Himself is not present in the world's dimensions of time and space described in stanzas II-IV. "His blessing" and "His praise" by human beings is what fills these dimensions. These two stanzas parallel each other in chiastic parallelism, which indicates a connection between them:

**Blessed** be **the name of the Lord**

**from** this time forth **and for** evermore.

**From** the rising of the sun **to** its setting,

**the Lord's name is to be blessed."**

Second, the threefold repetition of the phrase "the name of the Lord" in stanzas I-III also expresses distance. The praise and blessing are for **the name** of God, and not for God Himself. Verse IV does, in fact, speak of God Himself, "The Lord is high" and not "The Lord's name is high," but this difference stems from the fact that the content of this stanza itself expresses God's distance from His world: "His glory is above the heavens."

At first glance, stanza V appears to continue the content of stanza IV. It would seem that all that was stated in stanza IV is repeated in stanza V in different words:

**"The Lord is high… above the heavens"** – "Who is like **the Lord** our God, who is enthroned **on high… in heaven."**

 However, already in the possessive pronominal suffix attached to God's name in stanza V – "the Lord **our** God" – it is alluded that this stanza expresses God's **closeness** "to us" – His servants who praise Him. This closeness is also reflected in other words in this stanza: "in heaven, **and in earth";** "and yet looks **far down**."

The substantive and linguistic continuum between stanzas IV and V is meant only to emphasize the contrast between the two stanzas: God's **distance** as expressed in stanza IV (and in the two previous stanzas) as opposed to **distance that includes within it** God's **closeness** to His world. This explains the length of this stanza (which consists of four lines and two verses) as compared to the previous stanzas, as it comes to express a complex and paradoxical idea, as we will explain in the next section.

### III. Stanza V: "And Yet looks far down to behold" – from heaven to earth

Who is like the Lord our God,

Who is enthroned on high,[[17]](#footnote-17)

And yet looks far down to behold

The things that are in heaven, and on the earth.

 Even though stanza V is comprised of two verses, grammatically it consists of a single sentence, and the two verses should be read as one without interruption. The praise of "the Lord our God" expressed in this stanza relates to a set of His attributes that appear to contradict each other: "Who is enthroned on high" – "And yet looks far down to behold."

 A person sitting at the top of the world (both metaphorically and physically) is incapable of seeing what is taking place on the ground far below him. His distance (mental or physical) causes him to be cut off from that which his eyes cannot see, and he therefore becomes insensitive to that which is below him.

 However, "who is like the Lord our God" – who is not like that. Even though He is "enthroned on high," nevertheless "He looks far down to behold" and "the eyes of the Lord run to and from throughout the whole earth" (II *Divrei Ha-Yamim* 16:9). He is not insensitive to what takes places there, but rather He watches over the lowly.

 What is the role of the words that close stanza V: "in heaven, and on the earth"? Rashi reorders the words in the verse and explains: "Who is like the Lord our God, in heaven and on the earth." Thus, the verse is similar to the words of Moshe: "For what God is there **in heaven or in earth,** that can do according to Your works and according to Your might?" (*Devarim* 3:24).

 The Ibn Ezra explains that God raises His seat **above the heavens** ("His glory is **above** the heavens"), and yet He looks far down to see below Him, both that which is found in heaven and that which is found on earth.

 In our opinion, the correct explanation is the one brought by the Ibn Ezra in the name of R. Moshe Gikitilla: "Who is enthroned on high in heaven, and yet looks far down to behold the things on the earth." In other words, the words "in heaven, and on the earth" complement respectively the previous lines: "Who is enthroned on high, and yet looks far down to behold."[[18]](#footnote-18)

 The Ibn Ezra in his commentary to verses 5-6 (stanza V) summarizes them as follows:

This is what is written in the Torah: "[For the Lord your God] is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible"; and afterwards: "He executes the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and raiment" (*Devarim* 10:17-18).

 It is these verses that R. Yochanan cites in his statement in tractate *Megilla* (31a) to prove from the Torah that "wherever you find [mentioned in the Scriptures] the power (*gedulato*)[[19]](#footnote-19) of the Holy One, blessed be He, you also find his gentleness (*anvetanuto*) mentioned" (see note 1).

### IV. Stanza VI: "He raises up the poor out of the dust" – from the bottom of the earth to a High Seat

(7) He raises up the poor out of the dust,

And lifts the needy out of the ash heap;

(8) That He may set him with nobles,

With the nobles of his people.

 Stanza VI is simply a development and application of what was alluded to in the previous stanza, that "the Lord our God… looks far down to behold the things that are… on the earth."

 When He looks far down to the depth of the earth, to the "dust" and to the "ashheap,"[[20]](#footnote-20) Gods sees the poor and the needy and raises them from their wretched situation, and moreover, he set them with "nobles" – with princes and other distinguished people.[[21]](#footnote-21)

 Besides this connection, there is also another striking connection between stanza VI and stanza V that precedes it. In both of these stanzas, there is vertical movement, but in opposite directions. In stanza V, the movement is from above downwards: God "who is enthroned on high," "looks far down to behold" – from His seat in heaven, God casts His eyes down to the earth. In stanza VI, the movement is reversed: From the dust and from the ashheap, God raises the poor and the needy and sets them with the elite of human society – "with the nobles of his people."

 We see, then, that God's seat in the heights of the world, in heaven, not only does not cut Him off from what is taking place on the earth, but rather brings Him to act on the earth to raise up the lowliest of people to an elevated position, thus drawing them near to His place, "who is enthroned on high." God raises them and sets them "with the nobles of his people."

Who are "the nobles of **his** people"? Is this the people of the poor and needy individual, or perhaps the people of God? Each explanation has different consequences. The connection that we pointed out between the stanzas supports the explanation that "the nobles of his people" are the nobles of God's people.

 Stanza VI is also connected to stanza IV, at the end of the first half of the psalm. The root *resh-vav-mem* appears in our short psalm twice, in these two stanzas: In stanza IV – "The Lord is **high (*ram*)** above all nations"; and in stanza VI: "He **lifts (*yarim*)** the needy out of the ashheap." The meaning of this connection is similar to the connection discussed in the previous section (between stanza V and stanza VI). It is precisely the fact that God is "high" above all nations that brings Him to "lift" up towards Him the needy who is cast in the ashheap, and to raise him from his wretched situation. There is no contradiction between God's "power" and His "gentleness." On the contrary, His power is the root of His gentleness; the fact that He is "high" brings Him to "lift" up those who are low.

### V. Stanza VII

(9) He makes the barren woman (*akeret*)to keep house (*bayit*),

And be a joyful mother of children.

 Stanza VII continues to apply the attribute of God described in stanza V: "And yet looks far down to behold… on the earth." In this way it continues, of course, the stanza that precedes it, stanza VI.

 According to many commentators (Ibn Ezra, Radak, Meiri, and others), the word *akeret* does not form a construct with the word *bayit*, but rather stands independently and means "barren."[[22]](#footnote-22) The meaning of the first clause is thus: God sets the barren woman in a house – "that is to say, that she should have a household" (Radak).[[23]](#footnote-23) In our opinion, this explanation is far-fetched.

 From all that *Chazal* said about this verse (and it would similarly appear from Rashi's explanation, ad loc.), it seems that they understood the words *akeret bayit* as a construct. Thus, we find in *Bereishit Rabba* (71:1):

Barren woman are **forbidden in their own houses** and they are wretched, but once the Holy One, blessed be He, remembers them, they stand tall.

And later it says (71:2):

Barren women **fall in their own houses,** but once the Holy One, blessed be He, remembers them, they stand tall.

 While it is true that these *midrashim* expound different verses in the book of *Tehillim*, it is clear that the background for the description of barren women as being "forbidden **in their own houses,** and wretched," or alternatively as **"falling** in their own houses," lies in the expression brought in our verse, "*akeret bayit*," and that the meaning of this construct according to this is "the barren woman who is confined to her own house." A barren woman sits in her house, both because without children, her needs do not require of her to leave, and because of her shame. As *Chazal* formulated in the *Nachem* blessing: "She [Jerusalem] sits [in her house] with her head covered, like a barren woman who has not borne."[[24]](#footnote-24)

According to this explanation, the two clauses do not parallel each other, but rather constitute one whole sentence: God sets the barren woman who is confined to her own house to be the joyful mother of children. Instead of being imprisoned in her house owing to her barrenness, she sits in it with joy and gladness and raises her children.

Stanza VI and stanza VII both deal with the redemption that God brings to the most unfortunate, those people whose situation in human society is at the lowest possible level. God lifts them up from their lowliness and raises their status to the far extreme. In both of these stanzas, the change for the better introduced by God with respect to the fate of these people is expressed through the verb *le-hoshiv*:

**"That He may set** (*le-hoshivi*) them with nobles…" - **"He makes** (*moshivi*)… a joyful mother of children."

What, then, is the difference between stanza VI and stanza VII? How does the argument concerning God's lovingkindness advance from one stanza to the next?

First of all, note should be taken of the reason for wretchedness in each stanza. The poor and the needy in stanza VI suffer from economic deprivation, which bestows upon them low social status.[[25]](#footnote-25) But the status of a barren woman in the Biblical period was the lowest of all. A barren woman who is confined to her house, even if she doesn't suffer economic deprivation, suffers terrible distress in her house. She is liable to be divorced and sent away from her husband's house, or alternatively, she will have to put up with a rival wife that her husband will bring into his home. It is difficult to know which of these options is worse. The story of Rachel and Leah and the story of Chana and Penina are two Biblical examples of the depth of distress suffered by barren woman within their families.

The worsening of the type of distress from stanza VI to stanza VII gives expression to an elevation in the level of God's lovingkindness, which reveals itself in His actions undertaken to redeem the wretched man and woman from their miseries.

The nature of the redemption in stanza VII is also different from the nature of the redemption in stanza VI. The redemption of the poor and needy involves a movement of lifting, as was noted in the previous section. God raises them from the dust and from the ashheap and sets them with nobles. This change is connected to a change in place – a change in their status in the surrounding society and a change in their physical place as they are being set with the nobles.

This is not the case with regard to the redemption of a barren woman from her infertility. She too is made (*moshivi*) by God into a "joyful mother of children," but this *hoshava* is not connected to a change that involves movement. On the contrary, the woman was "a barren woman confined to her house" before she was blessed with children, and she is now "the mother of children" in that very same house, which is now filled with the laughter of children and the joy of their mother. This change in the fate of the barren woman, which changes her situation and family standing in her house from one extreme to the other, is even greater than the social change in the poor man's situation. The change in the fate of the barren woman relates not only to her social and family situation vis-à-vis the outside world, but also to the fulfillment of her human destiny as a woman. Therefore, this change brings her to an internal subjective upheaval that has no parallel in stanza VI – to the joy of the mother of children, joy that had been withheld from her while she was barren.

To be continued next week.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. \* In anticipation of the approaching holiday of Chanuka, which is marked by the recitation of *Hallel*, we will deal in the coming weeks with two chapters of *Hallel.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. To prove his assertion, R. Yochanan adduces verses from the Torah (*Devarim* 10:17-18), from the Prophets (*Yeshayahu* 57:15-16), and from the Writings (*Tehillim* 68:5-6). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Regarding the literary category of "psalms of praise," see the beginning of our study of Psalm 100, section I. Our psalm opens the psalms of *Hallel*; regarding this role, see the appendix to this study. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Regarding the enactment concerning the recitation of *Hallel* and the relationship between this *Hallel*, comprised of *Tehilim* 113-118, and other *Hallels* enacted by the Sages to be recited on various occasions, see the appendix to this study. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Regarding this sub-category of psalms of praise, see the source cited in note 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Amos Chakham in his *Da'at Mikra* commentary writes: "The word *mevorakh*, 'blessed,' means *mehullal*, 'praised,' as in (*Tehillim* 34:2): **'I will bless** the Lord at all times, **His praise** is always on my mouth,' and corresponds to *hallelu*, 'praise,' in the previous verse." [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. An example of an appeal that is answered with *yehi*: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem… Peace be (*yehi*)within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces" (*Tehillim* 122:6-7). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Psalms 96 (verses 11-12) and 98 (verses 7-8) record the responses of nature, even though the appeal that preceded the responses in these psalms was directed at "all the earth" – all of mankind. In Psalm 47, **there is an allusion** to the response of the nations to an appeal that was directed at them – see our book, pp. 158-160. Regarding another two psalms, see the next note. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Indeed, in another two adjacent psalms in which the appeal to praise God is directed to "the servants of the Lord," we find a description of their response: Psalm 134, the last of the *Shirei Ha-Ma'alot*, consists of an appeal to bless God that is directed at "all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord," and a citation of their response immediately following the appeal (verse 3): "May the Lord who made heaven and earth bless you out of Zion." With this the psalm ends. However, in contrast to our psalm, the appeal there is (relatively) long, and the response is short, and the response does not precisely correspond to the contents of the appeal.

Psalm 135 opens with the same words as does our psalm, but with a reversal of the order of the clauses: "Halelluya! Praise the name of the Lord; praise Him, O servants of the Lord," and it continues like the previous psalm: "You who stand in the house of the Lord…." This is followed by a lengthy rationale in verses 3-12. Verse 13: "Your name, O Lord, endures forever; and Your renown, O Lord, throughout all generations," appears to be the response of the servants of God, for only in that verse is God addressed in second person. It is clear, then, that even though this psalm cites the response of the servants of God, there is no comparision between this psalm and our psalm. At the end of this psalm, there is an additional complex appeal directed to the house of Israel, to the house of Aharon, to the house of Levi, and to those who fear the Lord, to bless God (verses 19-20). This is followed once again by a short response (verse 21): "Blessed be the Lord out of Zion, He who dwells at Jerusalem." [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. With a verbal *Hallel*, or with a *Hallel* expressed through actions (e.g., in bowing down or in bringing a gift to the courtyards of God), or perhaps a musical *Hallel*, with loud shouts and musical instruments. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In our study of Psalm 100, section I, we noted seven questions that must be answered in order to clarify the uniqueness of a psalm of praise in relation to other psalms of that type. In this section, we answered the first three questions (who is making the appeal, to whom is his appeal addressed, and what is the nature of the praise that he is asking for), and the fifth question (is a description given of the response of the addressees). The rest of this study is dedicated to the fourth question listed there - for what is God to be praised? [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For the analysis of the structure of the psalm below, I made use of the work of Aviva Ariel, presented to me in 5773 in the framework of a course at Herzog College. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Regarding the importance of dividing a psalm into short lines and stanzas, and the considerations leading to such a division, see the introductory study to this series of *shiurim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The considerations for the division into stanzas are grammatical and substantive, and evident to anyone examining the psalm. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. These words mean: From the place where the sun rises to the place where it sets. This includes the entire horizontal expanse – the entire world. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The second clause of the verse offers a rationale for the first clause. God is high above all the nations, **for surely** "His glory is above the heavens." According to this explanation, stanza IV is not built according to the format of stanzas II-III, and the reason for the difference will be explained below. Nevertheless, mention of the nations, whose place is on earth, and mention of the heavens in the second clause, allude to the range between the earth and the heavens, similar to the expressions of range in the previous stanzas: "From… to…." Other explanations of the verse draw it even closer to the previous two verses – see Ibn Ezra, Radak, and *Da'at Mikra.* [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. In the second half of the psalm, the verbs appear with a suffix – the letter *yod*: *hamagbihi*, *hamashpili*. This is a poetic addition for stylistic embellishment, but it has no grammatical significance. See below, section VII. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. R. Moshe adduces proof for this style ("respectively") from *Shemot* 25:7: "Shoham stones, and stones to be set in, for the *efod*, and for the breastplate" – shohan stones for the *efod* (*Shemot* 28:9), and stones to be set in for the breastplate (*Shemot* 28:17). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. This is the reading of MS Munich. See also *Dikdukei Soferim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibn Ezra: "*Ashpot* – singular form of *ashpatot* (*Eikha* 4:5)." [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. This is the meaning of the word in the Bible, as in the verse: "The well that the **princes** (*sarim*) dug out, that the **nobles** (*nedivei*) of the people delved" (*Bamidbar* 21:18). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibn Ezra: "And so too *atara* and *ateret* (*Yeshayahu* 28:1); *mamlakha* and *mamlekhet* (*Mikha* 4:8)." [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. According to this, the second clause, "And be a joyful mother of children," parallels the word "house" in the first clause, and the relationship between the two elements is one of deficient parallelism: He makes the barren woman of the house/ [He makes the barren woman] a joyful mother of children." [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The construct *akeret bayit* is used in modern Hebrew in a similar sense, but for the opposite reason. A woman who takes care of young children, and for that reason does not work outside her home, is an *akara* who is confined to her house. But why should the term *akara*, "barren," be attached to such a mother? It may be suggested that the modern use of this phrase is based on *Bereishit Rabba* 71:2, which expounds the term *akara* used in connection with Rachel: "She was the chief (*ikar*) of the house." [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. As for the "dust" and the "ashheap" in which the poor and the needy are said to be found, it is possible that this is to be understood literally. The poor live in these places, as they cannot afford proper human housing. But it is possible that these terms are used as metaphors for their contemptible social standing – the opposite of "the seat of the nobles" mentioned later in this stanza. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)