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*EIKHA*: THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

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**Shiur #54**

***Eikha*, Chapter Four**

***Eikha* 4:21-22**

**שִׂ֤ישִׂי וְשִׂמְחִי֙ בַּת־אֱד֔וֹם**

**יושבתי יוֹשֶׁ֖בֶת בְּאֶ֣רֶץ ע֑וּץ**

**גַּם־עָלַ֙יִךְ֙ תַּעֲבָר־כּ֔וֹס**

**תִּשְׁכְּרִ֖י וְתִתְעָרִֽי**

**תַּם־עֲוֹנֵךְ֙ בַּת־צִיּ֔וֹן**

**לֹ֥א יוֹסִ֖יף לְהַגְלוֹתֵ֑ךְ**

**פָּקַ֤ד עֲוֹנֵךְ֙ בַּת־אֱד֔וֹם**

**גִּלָּ֖ה עַל־חַטֹּאתָֽיִךְ**

**Be joyous and happy, daughter of Edom**

**Who lives in the land of Utz[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**The cup will pass over you as well[[2]](#footnote-2)**

**Get drunk and bare yourselves**

**[When] your transgressions cease, daughter of Zion**

**He will not continue to exile you**

**[When] your transgressions are remembered, daughter of Edom**

**He will reveal your sins**

Following the capture of her leader, the community abruptly falls silent. In what appears to be a bid to fill the silence, the narrator turns directly to address Judah’s enemy. Flinging bitter words at those who revel in Jerusalem’s downfall, the narrator pauses to issue a curse\prediction against the sneering foes of the Judean community.

In the final verse of the chapter, the narrator addresses Zion and Edom in inverse relation to one another. Describing each nation with the affectionate “*bat*,” the narrator then depicts the state of her transgressions. Despite the parallel structure of the verse, the narrator sketches antithetical situations for each nation: Zion will invariably cease her transgressions, while Edom’s transgressions will surface. By employing the word “*gala*” as a wordplay with directly opposite meanings, the narrator holds up a mirror to contrast these nations; Zion will not remain in exile (*gala*), and Edom’s sins will be revealed (*gala*). The unstated implication hints to Edom’s impending punishment (alluded to also in the previous verse).

The narrator directs his speech first to Edom and then to Zion, reverting at the end to address Edom directly. God, however, remains oddly obscured in these final verses. While He seems to be the likely candidate to punish Edom, discontinue Zion’s exile,[[3]](#footnote-3) and reveal Edom’s sins, the narrator omits any direct reference to God in the final verses of the chapter. God turned away from His nation in verse 16, and He does not seem inclined to intervene actively on the nation’s behalf. Moreover, Israel may not actively court God’s involvement, given the disastrous consequences of His attentions.

Despite God’s absence, the narrator expresses deep conviction that Zion’s sinning will end, her fortunes thereby reversed. By linguistically linking God’s decision not to continue to look at His nation (4:16: “*lo yosif le-habitam*”) with the reversal of Judah’s exile (4:22: “*lo yosif le-hagloteikh*”), the narrator asserts with confidence that God’s disregard for His nation is an impermanent state. Indeed, God may now hide His face from His nation, temporarily removing Himself from the nation’s misfortunes. However, God’s covenant with Israel remains eternal and unbroken, even as Israel’s adversaries sustain fleeting triumphs. Thus, even as Israel suffers her lowest moments in the book, the narrator adroitly anticipates a change of fortune, remaining stalwartly confident in God’s anticipated redemption.

*The Enemy*

Like the other chapters, chapter 4 concludes with a call for vengeance against Israel’s enemies. Oddly, the narrator explicitly mentions Edom, rather than the Babylonians. Possibly, the narrator directs his ire against Edom, rather than the actual perpetrator of the destruction, because he expected allegiance from Edom, based either upon their neighborly proximity[[4]](#footnote-4) or upon the family ties that bind the Edomites to Israel.[[5]](#footnote-5) Edom violates the expectation of brotherly loyalty (e.g. *Amos* 1:11; *Ovadiah* 12), a betrayal in some ways worse than the cruelty of the marauding conquerors.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Edom’s role in Jerusalem’s suffering remains somewhat unclear. In *Eikha* 4:21, the Edomites appear to be engaged in raucous celebration, ostensibly sparked by Judah’s misfortune and downfall.[[7]](#footnote-7) Edom’s delight in Jerusalem’s downfall finds expression in *Tehillim*’s description of Edom’s cheers as Babylon dismantles Jerusalem:

Remember God, against the sons of Edom, the day of Jerusalem, as they said, “Strip her! Strip her! Until [we see] her foundations!” (*Tehillim* 137:7)

*Eikha* 4:21 scathingly advises Edom to bare herself (*tit’ari*) in a final bawdy drinking spree before she receives retribution.[[8]](#footnote-8) Through use of this word, the narrator invokes the invective of the Edomites, as recorded in *Tehillim*, “*aru, aru*!”

We may possibly adduce a better understanding of the narrator’s ire at Edom by examining Ovadiah’s prophecy against Edom.[[9]](#footnote-9) In describing Jerusalem’s destruction, the prophet Ovadiah echoes our verse, but also adds a new understanding of the nature of Edom’s involvement in the catastrophic event:

Because of the violence [done to] your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame and cut off for eternity. *On the day that you stood opposite them*, on the day that foreigners absconded with his wealth, and strangers came into his gates, and a lot was cast against Jerusalem – *you were like one of them!* Do not gloat[[10]](#footnote-10) on your brother’s day, on the day of his calamity, and do not rejoice over the sons of Judah on the day of their destruction, and do not open your mouth wide on the day of distress. (*Ovadiah* 1:10-12)

Ovadiah describes Edom’s delight in Jerusalem’s calamity, compounding it with Edom’s role as impassive witness. But that is not all; Ovadiah affixes yet another layer to Edom’s complicit behavior:

*Do not enter the gates* of my nation on the day of their disaster, do not gloat you also, in his misfortune, on the day of his disaster, and *do not loot his wealth* on the day of his disaster. Do not *stand on the crossroad to cut off his refugees, and do not capture his survivors* on the day of his distress! (*Ovadiah* 1:13-14)

This prophecy greatly expands the level of Edom’s involvement.[[11]](#footnote-11) Edom does not merely celebrate Jerusalem’s downfall or stand by indifferently as enemies destroy her. In Ovadiah’s description, Edom enters Jerusalem opportunistically, looting the wealth of those maimed, killed, or exiled, and rounding up those who managed to escape. This evil behavior underlies our chapter’s particular censure of Edom.[[12]](#footnote-12)

The narrator acerbically encourages Edom’s merriment, cheering on their decadent and debased behavior, as a prelude to their ultimate punishment. In this way, their punishment comes as a response both to their cruel joy at Judah’s downfall and to their vulgar hedonistic parties. The expression that the narrator uses to allude to Edom’s punishment recalls Edom’s inebriated festivities: “The cup will pass over you.” We will now attempt to understand the meaning of that phrase.

*The Cup of Punishment*

This literary metaphor appears frequently in biblical passages, which often portray divine punishment as a cup of toxic drink that causes a fatal reaction.[[13]](#footnote-13) This cup sometimes contains wine, generating a state that resembles drunkenness, in which the one punished exhibits uncontrollable and shameful behavior.[[14]](#footnote-14) Sometimes the cup comprises God’s wrath, a metaphoric but visceral image of God’s ire, which issues forth like steam from a poisonous broth, causing death to those who imbibe it.[[15]](#footnote-15) God instructs Yermiyahu, for example, to offer the nations a cup of wine, the cup of God’s wrath (*Yermiyahu* 25:15). This cup causes the nations to stagger and fall, drunk, crazed, and vomiting (*Yermiyahu* 25:16-28).

In our verse, both Targum and Rashi explain that the cup that will pass over Edom is “a cup of troubles”[[16]](#footnote-16) or a “cup of curses.” The unnamed executor of Edom’s punishment is surely God, who frequently supplies the cup of divine punishment, both to His own people and to the nations of the world.

By using the word “also” (*gam*), our verse implicitly links Edom’s cup of punishment with Israel’s previous punishment: “The cup will *also* (*gam*) pass over you.” It appears that Edom will switch places with Zion, receiving her punishment in due course, as in Yeshayahu’s prophecy:

So says God, your God who fights for His nation: Behold, I have taken from your hands the cup of poison, the bowl, the cup of My wrath. You shall not continue to drink from it anymore. And I will place it in the hands of your tormentors, who said to you, “Lie down and let us pass over you.” And you placed your back like the ground and like the street for those who passed. (*Yeshayahu* 51:22-23).

*Hope and Vengeance*

A small glimmer of hopefulness emerges at the conclusion of the chapter, allowing it to conclude on an unusually optimistic note. Hope appears in several forms in these final verses. First, the statement (“When your transgressions cease, daughter of Zion, He will not continue to exile you”) recognizes that the exile represents punishment for sinfulness, rather than a permanent state. In this schema, the termination of sinfulness coincides with the termination of punishment. The narrator closes by expressing confidence in both Israel’s return from exile and the impending punishment of Israel’s enemy (“When your transgressions are remembered, daughter of Edom, He will reveal your sins”). Strikingly, instead of a plea to God to destroy the enemies, as we had in previous chapters, the narrator phrases his vengeful sentiment as an inevitable occurrence.

In a powerful expression of the need for a total reversal of the world order, the narrator links Edom’s downfall with Zion’s restoration. It appears that only by drastically changing the political situation can Judah hope to rise and restore her own fortunes. Indeed, the opposing fates of Israel and her tormentor often appear interconnected, as noted by Yeshayahu above (51:22-23).

This linkage may be especially true of the relationship between Israel and Edom, whose good fortune seems historically predicated on Israel’s bad fortune and vice versa.[[17]](#footnote-17) This idea harks back to the oracle that Rivka receives while she is pregnant with Yaakov and Esav, who skirmish in her womb:

Two nations are in your womb and two peoples will separate from your innards; *and one nation will be mightier than the other*, and the elder shall serve the younger. (*Bereishit* 25:23)

Isaac may allude to a similar idea when he blesses Esau:[[18]](#footnote-18)

And you shall live by the sword and you shall serve your brother. But it will be when you shall rule,[[19]](#footnote-19) you shall break his yoke from upon your neck. (*Bereishit* 27:40)

These verses suggest an ongoing inverse relationship between the two nations.[[20]](#footnote-20) Vengeance on Edom signifies Israel’s rise and redemption. By exchanging Israel’s misfortune with Edom’s, the verse sets in motion the reversal of Israel’s fortune. For this reason, the verses commingle Edom’s impending punishment with Zion’s hopeful future.

1. For the connection between Edom and Utz, see *Bereishit* 36:28. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. We will presently discuss the meaning of this phrase. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibn Ezra suggests that the subject of the phrase, “He will not continue to exile you,” harks back to the mention of God in verse 20. Alternatively, he suggests that the subject may be Zion’s sins, which until now have actively caused her exile. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. It should not surprise us that Israel expresses more bitterness against her neighbors than against the enemies who came to conquer her. Israel had often maintained economic and political relations with Edom, who now eagerly rejoice and even participate in her destruction. It is difficult to avoid the comparison to the complicit involvement of the neighbors of the Jews during the Holocaust. For more on this topic, see Jan Tomasz Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (London: Penguin, 2000); Barbara Engleking, *Such a Beautiful Sunny Day... - Jews Seeking Refuge in the Polish Countryside, 1942-1945* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem Publications, 2016); and the movie “Shoah” by Claude Lanzmann. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Edom is identified with Esau, Yaakov’s brother, in *Bereishit* 36:1,8. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The assumption that Israel expects Edom’s allegiance is based on the word “brother,” which appears in both the prophecies of Obadiah and Amos referenced above. See also *Devarim* 2:2-8 and 23:8, which offer Edom special familial treatment as befits a brother. Nevertheless, many biblical passages regard Edom not as a potential ally, but as a long-standing enemy, from whom we have little if any expectations of allegiance and against whom we actively seek destruction and punishment (e.g. *Yeshayahu* 34:8; 63:1-4; *Yermiyahu* 49:7-22; *Yechezkel* 25:12-14; 35: 1-15; *Yoel* 4:19; *Tehillim* 137:7; *II* *Divrei* *Hayamim* 20:10-11; 28:17). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Ibn Ezra, *Eikha* 4:21, who asserts that Edom’s joy and cheers of approval at Jerusalem’s downfall leads to this condemnation of Edom. In support of this, Ibn Ezra cites *Tehillim* 137:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This translation of the word *tit’ari* follows Ibn Ezra’s understanding of the word (see also Radak in his *Sefer Shorashim* on the word *ara*). Targum, Rashi, and R. Yosef Kara understand it differently, to mean either to empty the cup or to empty the contents of one’s stomach, namely to vomit. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. There is much discussion about the historical context of Obadiah’s undated prophecy. The subject of the prophecy revolves around Edom’s role in entering, conquering, and looting Jerusalem and capturing her inhabitants. Many scholars assume that these events relate to the Edomites’ role during the Babylonian conquest, as reflected in *Eikha* 4:21-22. For a review of opinions on this matter, see Yehuda Kil in *Da’at Mikra*, pp. 4-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. While the word literally means simply to look, the context suggests that it means to look with satisfaction, or to gloat. See the translation of the NJPS and BDB, *Lexicon*, p. 908. For similar uses, see *Micha* 7:10; *Yechezkel* 28:17; *Tehillim* 22:18. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See also the apocryphal book *I* *Esdras* (4:45), which maintains that the Edomites actively burned the Temple during the Babylonian conquest. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Midrashim* (e.g. *Sifrei* *Devarim* 343) and Rashi (*Eikha* 4:21) perceive Edom as a precursor to Rome, who destroyed the Second Temple. See also the Aramaic Targum on *Eikha* 4:21 (Yemenite manuscript edition), which reads, “the city of Rome,” for “*bat Edom*.” The suggestion that this chapter anticipates Rome’s destruction of Jerusalem, followed by the prolonged exile, reflects another attempt to account for the special attention accorded to Edom in chapter 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See e.g. *Tehillim* 60:5; 75:9 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See e.g. *Yermiyahu* 51:7; *Yechezkel* 23:31-34. *Chavakuk* 2:16 rebukes a person who forces his friend to drink until intoxicated so that he can see his nakedness. The prophecy continues by warning this individual that the cup in God’s right hand shall be used against him, to bring him disgrace in place of respect (*Chavakuk* 2:16). Some prophecies describe God simply punishing a nation with drunkenness, though they lack the image of a cup. See e.g. *Yermiyahu* 13:13; 48:26; 51:39. See *Ovadiah* 1:16, where this metaphor is wielded specifically against Edom. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See e.g. *Yeshayahu* 51:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This reading, adopted by Rashi, appears in the Yemenite manuscript edition of the Aramaic Targum on the verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See Rashi on *Bereishit* 25:23. Many rabbinic sources posit an inverse relationship between Yaakov’s fortunes and those of Esav, in which one’s rise is contingent upon the other’s fall. See e.g. *Bereishit* *Rabba* 6:5; *Megilla* 6a. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See Kli Yakar and Or Ha-Chayim in their commentary on *Bereishit* 27:40. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. This translation follows Rasag, Radak, and Ibn Ezra. For similar usages of this meaning of the word *tarid*, see e.g. *Bereishit* 1:28; *I Melakhim* 5:4. See also our discussion on *Eikha* 1:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For other biblical expressions of this interdependent relationship, see *Yoel* 4:19-20; *Amos* 9:11-12; *Ovadiah* 1:18, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)