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*EIKHA*: THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

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**Shiur #62:**

**The Structure of *Eikha*: The Theology of Suffering**

The book of *Eikha* consists of five independent units, as indicated by the acrostic composition of chapters 1-4.[[1]](#footnote-1) In spite of the autonomy of the chapters, the book does not appear to be an anthology of five unconnected laments, collected haphazardly into a book.[[2]](#footnote-2) *Eikha* demonstrates its literary unity by displaying shared linguistic features, themes, imagery, and form. Three chapters (1, 2, and 4) open with same word (*eikha*), the unique *kinah* meter finds expression in every chapter,[[3]](#footnote-3) and the structural division of chapters 1 and 2 seems to rely on a similar division between speakers.[[4]](#footnote-4) Themes such as the petition to God to look and see (*re’ei* *ve-habita*), tears that flow from darkened eyes, famine, cannibalism of the mothers, and Jerusalem’s churning innards and her widowed status appear in two or more chapters, thereby displaying cohesion and interconnectedness. The first four chapters appear to end in a similar manner, with a call for vengeance upon the enemy. Sometimes the chapters converse with each other, offering conflicting readings of the same psalm (*Tehillim* 37) or describing the progression from an inability to cry (2:11, 18-19) to the onslaught of tears (3:48-49).[[5]](#footnote-5)

Having established an inherent connection between the chapters, one wonders about the organizational principle that determines the shape of the book. *Eikha* does not seem to have an obvious progression of thought.[[6]](#footnote-6) Is the book composed in a meaningful way, in which the chapters are woven together in a unified composition, whose form reflects its meaning? If so, what is the nature of the book’s overall structure?[[7]](#footnote-7) Does the book progress along a linear continuum, or does it maintain a circular pattern? How would the central chapter fit into a chiastic shape? And most importantly, what is the concept that underlies its structure?

**A Linear Approach**

Some scholars maintain that a psychological reading of the book can help explain its haphazard structure, which reflects the unsystematic emotional responses that characterizes the experience of bereavement.[[8]](#footnote-8) David Reimar proposes an opposite approach.[[9]](#footnote-9) He suggests that *Eikha*’s chapters progress in a linear fashion, alongside the stages of grief. Using Elisabeth Kübler-Ross’ model of five stages of grieving, he detects a dominant perspective in the first four chapters that reflects the stages.[[10]](#footnote-10)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| First Stage: | Denial and Isolation |
| Second Stage: | Anger |
| Third Stage: | Bargaining |
| Fourth Stage: | Depression |
| Fifth Stage: | Acceptance |

Reimar correctly notes that isolation is the principle theme of chapter 1, corresponding to Kübler-Ross’ depiction of the initial stage as denial and isolation.[[11]](#footnote-11) Anger dominates the second chapter, mirroring the second stage of Kübler-Ross’ paradigm. Reimar claims that chapter 3 assumes a bargaining stance, engaging in good behavior (in the form of its reflections on God) in the hopes for a reprieve. This recalls Kübler-Ross’ third stage, in which the patient bargains with doctors or with God. Chapter 4, steeped in melancholy and lacking both prayer and hope, reflects a depressed emotional state, which parallels Kübler-Ross’ fourth stage. The final stage is acceptance, characterized not by happiness, but by resolution. Reimer does not find this stage in chapter 5, in which he discerns a sustained verbal attack on God and a desire for a future, attitudes that seems to reflect the opposite of Kübler-Ross’ acceptance. Still, in Reimar’s view, the organization of the book revolves around the psychological response of the community to their catastrophe.

Several ideas emerge from this organizational concept. According to this scheme, the book advances in a linear fashion, illustrating how the nation can progress. Small glimmers of forward movement (both in their emotional state and in their relationship with God) may be discernable, especially in chapters 4 and 5.[[12]](#footnote-12) This progression seems to have an ultimate goal of recovery – unlike Kübler-Ross’ model, which concludes with the patient resolving himself to his death. As Reimar notes, this does not occur in the final chapter of *Eikha*. Indeed, the divergence of chapter 5 from Kübler-Ross’ model points to a vastly different conclusion reached by the devastated community. Despite its relentless realism and wretched state, Israel maintains an abiding hope in its future. The community never accepts its demise, because it continues to believe in life.

**A Chiastic Structure**

An alternative model for understanding the arrangement of the chapters of *Eikha* proposes a chiastic (or concentric) structure.[[13]](#footnote-13) Simply put, this means that the book consists of two concentric circles that revolve around a core center.[[14]](#footnote-14) Chapters 1 and 5 comprise the periphery of the book, its outermost circle. The circle inside of that consists of chapters 2 and 4, which correspond thematically and linguistically. All of these chapters revolve around chapter 3, which lies at the core of the book and contains its focal theological treatise.

a- chapter 1

b- chapter 2

c- chapter 3

b'- chapter 4

a'- chapter 5

The circular structure indicates that the sufferer’s reconciliation with God at the center does not represent a substantive turning point in the book.[[15]](#footnote-15) Instead, the book returns to dwell on the nation’s pain and suffering in the following chapters, eclipsing the theological harmony achieved at its apex.

In the following section, I will bring evidence for the linguistic and thematic parallels that create correspondence between the parallel chapters. Following that, I will propose a theological understanding that fuels this chiastic structure, giving it purpose and meaning and underscoring the book’s vital questions.

**Chapters 1 and 5: Emptiness and Mourning**

To establish the correspondence between the chapters, we will begin by noting the linguistic similarities between them. Many of these words and phrases are unique to chapters 1 and 5, thereby strengthening the specific linkage between these chapters. The following chart illustrates the extensive linguistic relationship between chapters 1 and 5. Stars in the second column indicate that the highlighted words appears only in these two chapters:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **איכה, פרק ה'** | **איכה, פרק א'** |
| אמתינו **כאלמנות\*** (ה',ג') | היתה **כאלמנה** (א',א') |
| **על אלה** חשכו **עינינו** (ה',י"ז) | **על אלא** אני בוכיה **עיני עיני** ירדה מים (א',ט"ז) |
| נהפך ל**אבל** מחולנו (ה',ט"ז) | דרכי ציון **אבלות** (א',ד') |
| נחלתנו **נהפכה** לזרים (ה',ב')  **נהפך** לאבל מחולנו (ה',ט"ו) | **נהפך** לבי בקרבי (א',כ') |
| על צוארנו **נרדפנו** (ה',ה') | כל **רדפיה** השיגוה (א',ג') |
| על זה היה **דוה לבנו** (ה',י"ז) | ו**לבי דוי** (א',כ"ב)  כל היום **דוה** ( א',י"ג) |
| אבותינו **חטאו** ואינם (ה', ז')  אוי נא לנו כי **חטאנו** (ה', ט"ז) | **חטא** **חטאה** ירושלים (א', ח') |
| **ולא** **הונח\*** לנו (ה',ה') | **לא** מצאה **מנוח** (א', ג') |
| על **צוארנו\*** נרדפנו(ה',ה') | עלו על **צוארי** (א',י"ד) |
| **עבדים\*** משלו בנו (ה',ח') | ומרב **עבדה** (א',ג') |
| ונערים בעץ **כשלו\*** (ה',י"ג) | **הכשיל** כחי (א',י"ד) |
| **בנפשינו** נביא **לחמינו** (ה',ט') | מבקשים **לחם** נתנו מחמדיהם באוכל להשיב **נפש** (א',י"א) |
| **בחורים** טחון נשאו ונערים בעץ **כשלו** (ה', י"ג) | **הכשיל** כחי...קרא עלי מועד לשבור **בחרי** (א', י"ד-ט"ו) |
| מפני **חרב** המדבר (ה',ט') | מחוץ שכלה **חרב** (א',כ') |
| זקנים **משער** שבתו (ה',י"ד) | כל **שעריה** שוממין (א',ד') |
| זקנים משער **שבתו** (ה',י"ד) | שחקו על **משבתיה** (א', ז') |
| **שרים** בידם נתלו פני זקנים לא **נהדרו\*** (ה',י"ב) | ויצא מבת ציון כל **הדרה** היו **שריה** כאילים (א',ו') |
| על הר ציון **ששמם (**ה',י"ח) | כל שעריה **שוממין** (א',ד')  נתתני **שממה** (א',י"ג)  היו בני **שוממים** (א',ט"ז) |
| חדש **ימינו כקדם** (ה',כ"א) | אשר היו **מימי קדם** (א',ז') |
| מצרים נתנו **יד** (ה',ו')  פרק אין **מידם** (ה',ח')  שרים **בידם** נתלו (ה',י"ב) | נשקד על פשעי **בידו**...  נתנני א-דני **בידי** לא אוכל קום (א',י"ד)  פרשה ציון **בידיה** (א',י"ז) |
| נחלתנו נהפכה לזרים **בתינו** לנכרים (ה', ב') | מחוץ שכלה חרב **בבית** כמות (א', כ') |
| מצרים **נתנו** יד (ה',ו') | **נתנני** שממה (א',י"ג)  **נתנני** א-דני **בידי** לא אוכל קום (א',י"ד) |
| **נפלה** עטרת ראשה (ה',ט"ז) | **בנפל** עמה ביד צר (א',ז') |

Having established their literary similarities, we should observe that the tone and subject matter of the chapters are also in accord. Chapters 1 and 5 are quiet chapters; they do not concentrate on destruction. Instead, they record the emptiness and loneliness of the devastated city and its bereft community. Concerning themselves with what is no longer, chapters 1 and 5 detail that which is absent from their lives and from their city. These chapters speak longingly of the “days of old.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Key words include the word *ayin*, meaning none, and the word *almana*, indicating a lonely state of widowhood. Israel has no comforter, no one to help, and no deliverer. These are chapters of quiet grief, which depict eyes filled with tears, desolation (*shomem*), and mourning (*evel*).

**Chapters 2 and 4: Anger and Destruction**

Linguistic correspondences between chapters 2 and 4 abound, illustrating the correspondence between them. Once again, many of these words and phrases are unique to chapters 2 and 4, thereby strengthening the specific link of these chapters. Stars in the second column indicate that the highlighted words appear only in these two chapters:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **איכה, פרק ד'** | **איכה, פרק ב'** |
| **שפך\*** **חרון** **אפו** (ד',י"א) | **שפך** כאש **חמתו** (ב',ד') |
| **בראש כל חוצות\*** (ד',א') | **בראש כל חוצות** (ב',י"ט) |
| דבק לשון **יונק**...**עוללים** שאלו לחם (ד',ד') | בעטף **עולל יונק** ברחובות קריה לאמתם יאמרו איה דגן ויין (ב',י"א) |
| שישי **ושמחי\*** בת אדום (ד', כ') | **וישמח** עליך אויב הרים קרן צריך (ב', י"ז) |
| **תשתפכנה\*** אבני קדש (ד',א')  השפכים בקרבה דם צדיקים (ד',י"ד) | **נשפך** לארץ כבדי...**בהשתפך** נפשם אל חיק אמותם (ב',י"א-י"ב) |
| לאהאמינו **מלכי\*** ארץ (ד' י"ב) | חלל **ממלכה** ושריה (ב', ב')  וינאץ בזעם אפו **מלך** וכהן (ב', ו')  **מלכה** ושריה בגוים (ב',ט') |
| טובים היו **חללי** חרב **מחללי\*** רעב (ד', ט) | בהתעטפם **כחלל** ברחבות עיר (ב', י"ב) |
| רוח אפינו נלכד **בשחיתותם** (ד', כ') | **שחת** מבצריו (ב', ה')  **שחת** מעדו (ב', ו')  חשב ה' **להשחית** (ב', ח') |
| **בשבר בת עמי\*** (ד',י') | על **שבר בת עמי**  (ב',י"א) |
| כלה ...חמתושפך **חרון אפו** (ד',י"א) | איכה יעיב **באפו**...ביום **אפו** (ב',א')  גדע **בחרי אף** (ב',ג')  וינאץ בזעם אפו (ב', ו') |
| כלה ה' את **חמתו\*** שפךחרוןאפו (ד',י"א) | שפך כאש **חמתו** (ב',ד') |
| ויצת **אש**...**ותאכל** יסודותיה (ד',י"א) | ויבער...**כאש**...**אכלה** סביב (ב',ג') |
| מחטאות **נביאיה** עונות כהניה (ד',י"ג) | מלכה ושריה...גם **נביאיה** (ב',ט')  **נביאיך** חזו לך שוה ותפל (ב', י"ד) |
| מחטאות **נביאיה\*** עונת **כהניה** (ד', י"ג) | **כהן ונביא** (ב', כ') |
| **נעו** עורים...כי נצו גם **נעו** (ד',י"ד-ט"ו) | **ויניעו** ראשם (ב',ט"ו) |
| מִלֶּכֶת **ברחבתינו** (ד',י"ח) | **ברחבות** קריה (ב',י"א) |
| **גלה** **על\*[[17]](#footnote-17)** **חטאתיך** (ד',כ"ב) | לא **גלו** **על** **עונך** (ב',י"ד) |

Chapters 2 and 4 are loud and angry chapters, characterized by depictions of God’s anger, consuming fire, and destruction. The impact reverberates outward, as outsiders react to Jerusalem’s destruction. Some foreigners emit stunned disbelief, pondering their long-held notions of Jerusalem’s former status (2:15; 4:11). Israel’s hateful enemies speak in strident, arrogant tones, revealing both their delight in Israel’s downfall (2:16) and their revulsion at the contamination of the bloodied community (4:15).

A tone of abiding horror prevails in chapters 2 and 4, especially as they display the devastating effects of the famine in all of its gruesomeness. Society seems to unravel, as children die on the streets and the attending adults fail to protect and provide for them. These chapters reach a devastating climax of horror and moral failure when they divulge the unfathomable crime of maternal cannibalism.

**The Theology of the Structure**

If these chapters are similar linguistically and thematically, they likely reflect a corresponding theological approach.[[18]](#footnote-18) As we have noted throughout this study, troubling theological questions simmer beneath the book’s surface. These questions relate to God’s nature and to the manner of the relationship between the community and God. Can humans understand God’s ways? Is God an ally or an enemy? Are the people’s sins responsible for this calamity, or is it disproportionate and unjust? This has bearing on how Israel responds to its pain and loss. Is the nation remorseful or defiant? Ashamed or outraged? These represent the critical topics in the book, as they illustrate the intersection between emotions and theology and outline a blueprint for coping with pain and loss.

The structure of the book reflects and encourages theological complexity, offering two divergent approaches to suffering and God – one that portrays humans coming to terms with God’s actions and recognizing that they are justified, and the other in which humans resist reconciliation, maintaining a defiant posture of incomprehension and outrage.

The peripheral chapters of the book (1 and 5) focus on procuring an admission of guilt, on human acknowledgement of culpability. These chapters struggle with suffering, but they also struggle with sin, with the guilt and shame that accompany a confession. Chapter 1 mentions sin six times (verses 5, 8, 14, 20, 22), and the chapter seems to grope its way toward an admission of sinfulness. Initially, Jerusalem resists the conclusion that the responsibility for the calamity rests with her, instead focusing on God’s great wrath (verse 12).[[19]](#footnote-19) Once Jerusalem acknowledges God’s righteousness in verse 18, admission of sin follows (verses 18, 20), and the chapter concludes with Jerusalem’s declaration that these events have occurred “because of all of my sins” (verse 22). In chapter 5, the community initially deflects responsibility for the calamity, defiantly proclaiming, “Our fathers sinned and they are no more, and we suffered for their iniquities” (verse 7). However, the chapter appears to progress toward conceding responsibility, and the community finally proclaims, “Woe to us for we have sinned!” (verse 16). Chapters 1 and 5 arrive at a measure of theological equilibrium, regarding sin as the cause for their suffering. These chapters end up concluding that the world makes sense and God is just.

Chapters 2 and 4 never attain theological tranquility. Guiltless children die alongside their righteous leaders (2:20; 4:4-5, 7-8) and the world makes no sense. These chapters contain accusation and anger at God, who lobs His punitive actions indiscriminately (“as an enemy”), perhaps even capriciously, disproportionately, and against innocents. Admission of widespread guilt does not appear in these chapters;[[20]](#footnote-20) at best, they point to the culpability of their leaders (2:14; 4:13).[[21]](#footnote-21) These chapters depict the incomprehension of humans who struggle with God’s active role in their suffering. Chapter 2 climaxes by flinging an accusation against God (verse 21): “You murdered on the day of Your anger; You slaughtered and You did not pity!” Chapter 4 never addresses God, whose active role in the chapter is destructive and decisive (verses 11, 16).[[22]](#footnote-22) God’s absence seems final,[[23]](#footnote-23) and the general tenor of chapter 4 mirrors the fatalism and confusion of chapter 2. In these chapters, nothing is resolved. The community continues to struggle to grasp the inexplicable suffering of the righteous and the role of God in an unjust world. If the peripheral chapters of the book project some measure of comprehension, the inner circle reflects bewilderment, outrage, and despondency.

How can the book produce two totally different perceptions of God’s role in human suffering? What is the *correct* response to God’s role in human tragedy, particularly within a national context? The structure of the book indicates that the answer is not simple, and that two opposing approaches co-exist in tension.[[24]](#footnote-24)

On the one hand, chapters 1 and 5 illustrate the need to rely on simple faith, on the belief in God’s justness, and in a meaningful pattern of relationship between God and His nation. Without this type of faith, the world is dark and absurd, incomprehensible and evil. Moreover, by adhering to this approach, Israel can understand how to repair its relationship with God and restore order to its world.

On the other hand, *Eikha* does not rest upon simple formulae or facile answers in confronting pre-eminent theological quandaries. Chapters 2 and 4 face the world’s absurdities and tragedies with stark frankness. Pat answers cannot explain the death of children or human suffering. Mass tragedy, illness, and suffering are inexplicable. However, they are also part of the human condition and the manner in which human’s grapple with God. Chapters 2 and 4 illustrate the anguish and confusion that humans experience as they contend with suffering, making room for the complexity of the human condition and its inability to grasp God.

The book’s chiastic structure presents a circular manner of contending with God’s role in human suffering. *Eikha* proposes that humans should balance two conflicting approaches, maintaining a perpetual oscillation between contradictory notions: simple, pure faith in God’s world and incensed dismay over its incomprehensibility. Thisproduces a realistic model for humans who struggle honestly to balance fidelity to God with a world that can often seem cruel and unfair.[[25]](#footnote-25) How is it possible to maintain a relationship with God within such a disquieting paradox? This ability to navigate an inscrutable world depends upon the willingness to live with complexity. It also depends upon human tenacity – the steadfast determination to maintain faith in God’s goodness and in human resilience, as we will see in the middle chapter.

**Chapter 3: The Critical Center**

The chiastic structure directs our attention to the chapter that lies at its heart. Chapter 3 represents the theological center of the book, its ideological crux.[[26]](#footnote-26) Portraying an individual sufferer who grapples with God, its middle section (verses 21-39), constitutes the core of the book.[[27]](#footnote-27) There, the sufferer contends with the question of God’s nature. The book’s center depicts a sovereign and righteous God, defined by His enduring compassion and allegiance to His nation.

Intriguingly, the subject that lies in the book’s innermost nub (3:26-30) focuses upon humans. There, the book suggests that humans should submit to their suffering in a quest to find meaning in it. The word “*tov*” appears as the opening word of the three *tet* verses (25-27), tantalizing the reader with the optimistic notion that good lies at the heart of the human experience.

*Eikha*’s structure mirrors a whirlwind or a storm.[[28]](#footnote-28) The middle section of chapter 3 represents the placid center (the eye of the whirlwind), which is engulfed by the suffering and misery that swirls around it. This image focuses attention upon the surprisingly calm center, but does not ignore the significance of the powerful winds that encircle it.

This design represents the shape of the sufferer’s theological experience. Two parallel rings enfold the sufferer, representing the tangled fluctuation between theodicy and outrage. It is critical for the sufferer to move back and forth between these contradictory approaches in order to contend adequately with the theological questions presented by loss. However, despite the turbulence that surrounds him, the sufferer can find tranquility in his innermost being. Humans can combat the onslaught of hostile forces that swirl around them, because they can draw from the hope and faith that lie at their core. In this way, *Eikha* weaves a magnificent portrait of the resources that lies deep within the human soul.

**Conclusion**

The experience of loss represents an opportunity to dig deeper into the nature of humans and their relationship with God. Suffering produces introspection, and an examined life generates purposeful existence.

*Eikha*’s structure offers a multifaceted model for the religious person to cope with suffering. The two concentric circles that surround the central chapter reflect the idea that the human-God relationship remains a complex affair, filled with circular and contradictory movements that mirror the theological turmoil that envelops humans. At its core, we find human tenacity and optimism, fueled by abiding faith in God’s righteousness and compassion. God’s ways are eternal; they renew themselves daily (3:23). Even if humans do not always comprehend, hope for good prevails.

1. Chapter 5 lacks an acrostic structure, but maintains the twenty-two verse length. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Some scholars consider the book to be a collection of disconnected songs (based on genre and style). See e.g. Westermann, *Lamentations*, pp. 53-58. Berlin, *Lamentations*, p. 6, suggests that the common themes may be stereotypical tropes of destruction. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See [shiur #7](https://www.etzion.org.il/en/shiur-07-biblical-poetry-and-book-eikha-part-i). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See [shiur #21](https://www.etzion.org.il/en/shiur-21-eikha-chapter-2). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dobbs- Allsopp, *Lamentations*, p. 23, asserts that each chapter joins to other chapters in a multiplicity of overlapping ways. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Many scholars maintain that the book defies any real order. See e.g. B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM, 1979), p. 594; M. S. Moore, “Human Suffering in Lamentations,” *Revue* *Biblique* 90 (1983); Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Some scholars have proposed creative explanations for *Eikha*’s structure. For example, W. H. Shea, “The Qinah Structure of the Book of Lamentations,” *Biblica* 60 (1979), pp. 103-107, suggests that the chapters create a pattern that conforms to the *kinah* meter (3 + 2). [See [shiur #7](https://www.etzion.org.il/en/shiur-07-biblical-poetry-and-book-eikha-part-i), where we explain the *kinah* meter.] *Eikha*’s first three chapters are lengthy ones, while the final two chapters are distinctly shorter, resulting in the 3 + 2 pattern. In this schema, the overall structure of the book is an evocative echo of the *kinah* meter often employed in *Eikha*’s binary sentences. J. Renkema, “The Literary Structure of Lamentations (I-IV),” *The Structural Analysis of Biblical and Canaanite Poetry*, W. van der Meer and J. C. de Moor (eds.) (Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), pp. 294-396; J. Renkema, “The Meaning of the Parallel Acrostics in Lamentations,” VT 45 (1995), pp. 379-383, maintains a creative scheme, in which the letter strophes of each chapter correspond. Thus, all of the verses that open with the letter *aleph* (as well as the first verse of chapter 5) maintain related or interconnected concepts. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See P. Joyce, “Lamentations and the Grief Process: A Psychological Reading,” *Biblical* *Interpretation* 1 (1993), p. 314. Several studies have engaged in psychological analysis of the book of *Eikha*. See for example, D. L. Smith-Christopher, “A Biblical Theology of Exile,” (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), pp. 75-104; H. A. Thomas, “Relating Prayer and Pain: Psychological Analysis and Lamentations Research,” *Tyndale* *Bulletin* 61 (2010), pp. 183-209. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. D. J. Reimar, “Good Grief? A Psychological Reading of Lamentations,” *ZAW* 114 (2002), pp. 542-559. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See E. Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan, 1970). Joyce (n.8 above) also utilizes Kübler-Ross’ model, arriving at a very different conclusion. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Reimar, *Grief*, p. 6, notes that there is no denial in chapter 1, although this is the primary idea of Kübler-Ross’ first stage. He thus largely bases himself on the characteristic of isolation, which seems to be a secondary characteristic in Kübler-Ross’ model. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. According to E. Assis, “The Unity of the Book of Lamentations,” *CBQ* 71 (2009), pp. 311, 329, this is because the turning point of the book occurs in its middle section, which restores a modicum of hope to the book. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See e.g. Gordis, *Lamentations*, p. 127; Assis, “Unity,” pp. 306-329. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. While many scholars maintain that the primary purpose of the concentric structure is to focus attention on its middle (see e.g. Y. Radday, “Chiasmus in the Hebrew Biblical Narratives,” *Beit* *Mikra* (1974), pp. 48-72 [Hebrew]), it seems clear that the corresponding themes of surrounding chapters is of no less significance in the chiastic design. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Assis, *Unity*, pp, 310-311, suggests otherwise, even as he accepts the concentric structure. As noted above, Assis maintains that chapters 4 and 5 contain guarded hope, even as they mirror the overall themes and tone of their corresponding chapters. He maintains that this is because chapter 3 constitutes a turning point, a transition from despair to hope. This may be overstating the case, as the chapters do return to describe a similar state of suffering as before chapter 3. Chapter 4 seems to suggest a deterioration in some way, as the chapter lacks any address directed to God. Nevertheless, one can discern a slight progression in the book, even though its circularity prevails. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. While the phrase “days of old” appears in chapter 2 as well (2:17), there it does not describe the yearning for a glorious past. Instead, that verse describes God bringing about the punishment that he promised in “days of old.” [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The expression “*gila* *al*” appears only in these chapters. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Gordis, *Lamentations*, pp. 126-127, proposes that the correspondences between these chapters reflect different historical settings and dates of composition. Chapters 1 and 5 reflect the indignities of national subjection, indicating that their composition takes place long after the destruction. Chapters 2 and 4 offer an eyewitness account, written closer in time to the catastrophe. See similarly Assis, *Unity*, pp. 306-329, who broadly accepts this model, developing the linguistic and thematic correspondences in order to prove the unity of the book. In my opinion, the key to understanding the theology of the book is to note the nature of the parallel chapters, as I will explain. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See shiur #20. The objective narrator (who speaks in verses 1-11) has no problem describing Jerusalem’s sins in chapter 1 (see verses 5; 8-9). It is only once Jerusalem herself begins to speak (at the end of verse 11) that we see her resistance. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See our discussion of the phrase *avon bat ammi* (*Eikha* 4:6) in shiur #46, where I explain why this verse remains consistent with my portrayal of chapter 4. In contrast, see Gottwald, *Lamentations*, p. 67, who maintains that all five chapters (“even chapter 2”) witness the prophetic concept of sin. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. This seems to contrast with chapters 1 and 5, which feature all of the nation: young and old, men and women, common-folk, priests, and officers. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Chapter 4 does conclude by acknowledging the central role that Zion’s sinfulness can play in her restoration (*Eikha* 2:22). However, the chapter itself steers away from confession or even prayer, seeming to accept the dissolution of the relationship between Israel and God. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See 4:16-19 and note the description of the pursuer, who is swifter than the eagles of the heavens (verse 19.) This imagery recall God’s promise of redemption on the wings of eagles in *Devarim* 32:11, thereby alluding to God’s absent deliverance during this catastrophe. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See J. Middlemas, “The Violent Storm in Lamentations,” *JSOT* 29 (2004), pp. 94-95. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. In this vein, Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, pp. 27-33, notes that both theodic and anti-theodic attitudes co-exist in *Eikha*. Alongside the bid to defend God’s goodness and omnipotence in view of the existence of evil, *Eikha* refuses to condone or explain all suffering as meaningful or good. God’s ways are not easily justified or understood. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Many scholars note the central theological importance of Chapter 3. See, for example, Grossberg, *Centripetal*, p. 85; A. Mintz, “The Rhetoric of Lamentations and the Representation of Catastrophe,” *Prooftexts* 2, 1 (1982), p, 10; Middlemas, *Storm*, p. 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See Mintz, *Catastrophe*, p. 10; Middlemas, *Storm*, p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. For an elaboration of this idea, see Middlemas, *Storm*, p. 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)