From Rebuke to Consolation

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The Synagogue Bible and Popular Jewish Theology

An investigation of the Bible in its liturgical setting is particularly important to the study of late antique Judaism because, unlike the scribal workshop or the *beit midrash*, the synagogue was the locus of the popular encounter with the Bible. While the rabbinic sages and their students might have had access to complete texts of the Hebrew Bible, the lay people who frequented the synagogue probably did not. Rather, they encountered only the biblical texts that were recited in the synagogue service. Thus, the selection of lectionary texts, and the rituals which developed around them, determined the nature and content of the Bible as it was experienced by most Jews in the early centuries of the common era. The lectionary texts that were recited in the synagogue were the “required reading” for Jewish lay people. The literature and rituals that developed around the public recitation of the Torah were the means through which the Bible was defined, shaped and continually resignified for the popular audience.

The rabbinic lectionary system defines a synagogue Bible that is different in both content and form from the 24 books of the canonical Hebrew Bible. The central text of the synagogue canon is the Pentateuch. According to m. Meg 4:1–2, portions from the Pentateuch are read on sabbaths, festivals, new moons, Mondays, Thursdays, and public fast days. Within the synagogue context, the recitation of the Torah is governed by a conservative hermeneutic which functions to assure the audience that the Torah text being recited is identical to the Torah which was revealed at Sinai. Through the rules governing scribal practice, the synagogue audience is assured that the text from which the lector is reading has been
meticulously copied and therefore is identical with its Sinaitic prototype.1 The rules governing the recitation of the Torah text assure that the recitation of the text corresponds in all details to the written text. The Mishnah notes that the reader is not permitted to skip text within a given pericope (m. Meg 4:4). T. Megillah 3:10 dictates that the Pentateuch should be read sequentially from week to week.2 In addition, if a reader makes a mistake in the reading, he is obligated to return and correct his mistake.3 Thus, the rules governing the recitation of scripture insure that the recitation is an accurate representation of the written scroll which is, in turn, an accurate copy of its original Sinaitic prototype.4 To underscore this point, the ritual surrounding the Torah reading is modeled on the Sinai event. In j. Meg 4:1, R. Samuel bar R. Isaac scolds a man for leaning on a post while translating the Torah portion; he then scolds another for both reading and translating the portion. He rebukes them by saying that since Torah was given in fear and trembling, through the hand of an intermediary, we must treat it with fear and trembling and recite it through an intermediary.

While the synagogue Torah is identical to the canonical Torah, there is a wide discrepancy between the prophetic canon of the Hebrew Bible and the prophetic canon of the synagogue in terms of function, size and order. First, within the synagogue context the prophetic texts are identified as important, but subordinate to Torah. Unlike the Torah portion (Heb. parashah; pl. parashot), the haftarah was read only on sabbaths, festivals and public fast days (m. Meg 4:1–2). In addition, b. Meg 23a states that the person who reads the haftarah must first read the final verses of the parashah “out of respect for the Torah.” This custom articulates an intrinsic connection between the parashah and the haftarah; it suggests that the haftarah is connected to, and dependent on, the Torah portion. The rules governing the stacking of scripture texts reinforce the higher status of the Pentateuch. According to b. Meg 27a, one is permitted to place single books of the Torah on top of single books of the prophets or writings but the re-

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2. According to a baraita cited on b. Meg 31b, there were differing opinions regarding the consecutive reading of the Torah. R. Meir stated that consecutive texts should be read on sabbath morning, sabbath afternoon, Monday, and Thursday. R. Judah stated that consecutive texts should be read on consecutive sabbath mornings. On the intermediate days, the beginning of the weekly portion should be recited again. The Gemara rules in accordance with the latter opinion.
3. J. Meg 4:5.
4. The division of the texts into lectionary units and the mode of cantillation are the only means through which the pentateuchal text itself is shaped in the public recitation ritual.
verse is prohibited. This dictum translates the differing statuses of the Torah and the prophetic books into concrete terms.

This status differential is reflected in the synagogue reading practices as well. Unlike the Pentateuch, which was recited sequentially, in its entirety, over the course of the lectionary cycle, only a small percentage of the biblical prophetic texts were recited as haftarot. In addition, the prophetic texts were always read in conjunction with, and as a coda to, the pentateuchal texts. Thus, Jews who encountered the Bible only in the synagogue would have no concept of a prophetic book. For these audience members, the basic prophetic unit would have been a single pericope which was conjoined to a “corresponding” pentateuchal text. By creating these parashah/haftarah pairs, the rabbinic redactors of the lectionary cycle create new, second-order biblical texts which might underscore, subvert or transform the meanings of the lectionary texts in their biblical contexts. The first parashah/haftarah pair of the lectionary year provides an illustrative example. Isaiah 42:5–43:11 is designated as the haftarah which accompanies Gen 1:1–6:8. This prophetic text adds a particularist valence to the relatively universalist primeval history of Gen 1–6. The Torah portion describes the creation of the earth and God’s interaction with the earliest humans. The text makes no mention of particular nationalities or of the special status of the Israelites. The haftarah, however, makes a connection between God’s creative acts and God’s selection of Israel:

Thus says God, YHWH,
Who creates the heavens and stretches them out, who spreads out the earth and its offspring;
Who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk on it.
I, YHWH, have called you in righteousness and I have taken you by the hand; I have created you and made you a covenant people, a light to the nations. (Isa 42:5–6)

By selecting Isa 42:5–6 as the haftarah for the beginning of Genesis, the redactors of the lectionary cycle retroject the special status of Israel to the beginning of time and assert that it is an intrinsic part of the created order of the world.⁵

The parashah/haftarah pair for any week of the lectionary would demonstrate certain redactional strategies and would potentially articulate interesting theological assertions. However, no single pair would demonstrate the range of strategies operative within the lectionary genre.

⁵ For analyses of the relationships between parashot and haftarot throughout the lectionary year, see Michael Fishbane, JPS Bible Commentary: Haftarot (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2002).
In contrast, the Tisha b’Av cycle is the most extensive, coherent lectionary example within the “synagogue Bible.” Because the sequence is so extensive, it provides an excellent case study for an analysis of the lectionary as a vehicle for the rabbinic construction of a public Bible.

In this chapter I will show how the redactors of the lectionary cycle use the strategies of identification, selection and arrangement to create the new second-order biblical compilation which is the lectionary cycle. Through a close reading of the lectionary cycle, I will show how the literary structures, patterns and features of the cycle transform the meanings of the constituent biblical texts. Despite their disparate origins and contexts within the Bible, within the context of the lectionary sequence the biblical texts all respond both theologically and emotionally to the events commemorated on Tisha b’Av.

History of the Tisha b’Av Lectionary Cycle

The complete lectionary cycle for the Tisha b’Av season is first attested in the Pesikta de-Rav Kahana, a fifth- to sixth-century collection of midrashim which comment on the lectionary texts for festivals and special sabbaths. According to PRK, the lectionary cycle consists of texts beginning with the following verses.6

Three of Rebuke:7

- Jeremiah 1:1
- Jeremiah 2:4
- Isaiah 1:21/Lamentations 18

6. Since PRK only identifies the first verses of each pericope, it is impossible to deduce the extent of the haftarot from this source.
7. The rubrics are first attested to in the twelfth century in Mahzor Vitry and in the tosafists’ comment to b. Meg 31b.
8. There is a discrepancy between early and later traditions regarding the third haftarah of rebuke. Chapter 15 of PRK, which is the third chapter in the treatment of the Tisha b’Av season, is a composite chapter which treats both Isa 1:21 and Lam 1:1 as the opening verses of the lectionary text. This conflation is motivated by the parallelism between the two verses and the inclusion of both texts in the lectionary cycle. However, it makes it impossible to determine decisively the exact nature of the third haftarah. There are three possibilities: 1) PRK preserves a tradition of two special haftarot before the ninth of Av, in which case chapter 15 corresponds to the lectionary texts of the holiday itself. 2) Isaiah 1:21ff. was recited on the sabbath immediately preceding the ninth of Av. If this is the case, then chapter 15 represents a
Seven of Consolation:

- Isaiah 40:1
- Isaiah 49:14
- Isaiah 54:11
- Isaiah 51:12
- Isaiah 54:10
- Isaiah 60:1
- Isaiah 61:10

This haftarah cycle eventually became a canonical part of the major liturgical rites throughout the Jewish diaspora. However, as a consequence of the particular development of liturgical traditions in the gaonic and medieval periods, its fifth- to sixth-century Palestinian origin was identified only in the past century. By the end of the amoraic period, two major systems of lectionary practice had developed. In the system that became dominant in Babylonia, the entire Torah was read over the course of a year. In the system that was prevalent in Palestine, the entire Torah was recited over a period of three to four years. By the fourteenth century, the Babylonian system became canonical throughout most of the Jewish world. As a result, it became impossible to reconstruct the triennial lectionary traditions or to identify which elements of the extant reading customs originated in the now defunct triennial tradition. It was not until the pioneering work of Leopold Zunz and the discovery of the Cairo genizah material that scholars were able to reconstruct the Palestinian lectionary cycles and, as a result, identify the origins of the Tisha b’Av cycle.

Gaonic and medieval sources refer frequently to a midrashic collection known alternately as Pesikta, Piskot, and Pesikta Zuta. However, by the sixteenth century, references to the work cease to appear—suggesting that composite treatment of the texts for the sabbath preceding the ninth of Av and for the holiday itself. 3) Lamentations 1:1ff. was recited on the sabbath preceding the holiday.

The extant poems of the sixth- to seventh-century liturgical poets Yannai and Kallir identify Lam 1:1 as the opening verse of the third lectionary text of the cycle. The poems of Yannai include liturgical poems for the three weeks preceding Tisha b’Av and the three weeks after. The poems for the three weeks preceding the holiday are based on Jer 1, Jer 2:4, and Lam 1, respectively. The situation is further complicated by a statement by the tosafists which asserts that the Pesikta designates Isa 1:1 as the opening verse of the third haftarah.

9. See n. 1.
all manuscripts were lost. In 1832, Leopold Zunz reconstructed the text from references in the later midrashic compilations.10 Zunz’s reconstruction ignited scholarly interest in the lost text, and in 1868 Solomon Buber published a composite edition of the work based on manuscripts which had been discovered since Zunz’s reconstruction.11 The publication of Buber’s edition of PRK made possible the scholarly study of the early Palestinian midrashic traditions relating to the lectionary texts for festivals and special sabbaths, including those for the weeks surrounding Tisha b’Av.

Like PRK, the poems of the sixth- to seventh-century liturgical poets Yannai and Kallir attest to the antiquity and Palestinian origins of the cycle. The surviving poems of Yannai include liturgical poems for the three weeks preceding Tisha b’Av and the first, second, and fourth weeks following it. The poems preceding the holiday are based on Jer 1, Jer 2:4 and Lam 1:1, respectively. Thus, with the exception of the third week, Yannai’s haftarot of rebuke correspond to those of PRK. Yannai’s poems for the weeks following the holiday are based on Isa 40:1, Isa 49:14 and Isa 51:2. The surviving poems of Eleazar Kallir include poems for the three weeks preceding Tisha b’Av and the first six weeks following it. Kallir, like Yannai, seems to know Lam 1:1 as the opening verse of the lectionary text for the third Sabbath preceding Tisha b’Av. Kallir’s haftarot for the six weeks following the holiday correspond to those invoked in PRK.

The Talmud and post-talmudic commentaries, as well as extant lectionary traditions, provide more data for determining the original form and development of the Tisha b’Av cycle. While the Talmud does not attest to the full lectionary cycle, it does designate Isa 1:14 as the haftarah for Rosh Hodesh Av when it falls on a sabbath. This tradition is not attested in the midrash, the piyyut, or later lectionary lists. The tosafists of the twelfth century recognize the discrepancies between the Talmud on the one hand, and PRK and contemporary practice on the other. In their comment on the statement, “On Rosh Hodesh Av that falls on shabbat, recite as haftarah: My soul despises your new moons and festivals (Isa 1:14),” they state:

We do not do this. Rather, we recite the haftarah from Jeremiah, Hear the words of the Lord (Jer 2:4). On the sabbath before Tisha b’Av we recite, The vision of Isaiah (Isa 1:1), and the reason is that we behave according to the Pesikta, which is to say, three of rebuke before the ninth of Av. They are: The words of Jeremiah (Jer 1:1), Hear the words of the Lord (Jer 2:4), The vision

10. Leopold Zunz, Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden historisch entwickelt (Berlin: A. Asher, 1832).

of Isaiah (Isa 1:1). After the ninth of Av come the seven of consolation and
the two of repentance. (b. Meg 31b)

With the exception of the sabbath immediately preceding the holiday,
the cycle cited by the tosafists is identical to that found in PRK. With a few
exceptions, the major liturgical sources, which reflect Ashkenazic, Sephardic,
North African, Italian and Romanian practices, follow the lectionary
cycle designated by the tosafists. In addition, these sources attest to the
extent of each haftarah pericope. While the extent of the texts is attested
only in medieval sources, the high degree of consistency among the differ-
ent rites suggests that the traditions regarding the extent of the pericopes,
like the traditions regarding their opening verses, are ancient.

Though there is no explicit attestation regarding the authorship of the
Tisha b‘Av lectionary cycle, it is clear that it is of rabbinic provenance.
First, the presence of lectionary lists in b. Meg 31a–b shows that the rabbis
of the academy whose comments are preserved in the Talmud were also
responsible for determining certain lectionary traditions. In addition, the
appearance of the cycle in PRK and the early piyyutim, as well as the later
ubiquity of the cycle throughout a wide range of lectionary rites, demon-
strates that it was authorized and utilized by the rabbis from an early date.
Finally, as I will argue in the following chapters, the affinities between
the rabbinic theology which is articulated in the midrashic collections and the
theology articulated in the Tisha b‘Av cycle testifies that the lectionary
cycle was born in the same rabbinic, academic milieu as the midrashic col-
lections. Just as there is no explicit evidence regarding authorship of the
lectionary, there is also no explicit evidence regarding the process of re-
daction. One might argue that the lectionary texts were chosen as paradig-
matic texts of rebuke and consolation and bear no intrinsic relationship to
one another; or one might argue that the cycle was constructed haphaz-
ardly and reflects no principles of selection at all. While I can make no de-
finitive statements regarding authorial intent, the coherent structure of the
cycle seems to reflect a high degree of intentional redaction.

The coherence of the structure was noted by medieval Jewish com-
mentators. First, the rubrics “three of rebuke” and “seven of consolation,”
which are used by the twelfth-century Mahzor Vitry, the tosafists, and later
commentators, attest to a thematic coherence which unites the sections of
the cycle. In addition, both Mahzor Vitry and the fourteenth-century Span-
ish commentator Abudarham understand the structure of the entire cycle
to be meaningful. Vitry notes that the haftarot of consolation proceed
“little by little”—in a manner which is appropriate to the consolation of

(Heb.) for a complete list of the lections designated by the various rites.
grief. Abudarham notes the dialogic structure of the haftarot of consolation. He understands the order of the haftarot to reflect a dialogue between God, the prophets, and Israel. Thus both Mahzor Vitry and Abudarham saw the cycle as a coherent and ordered sequence, not a random collection.

This impression of coherence is supported by the cycle itself. First, the haftarot of consolation are selected from the sections of Isaiah that allude most frequently to Lamentations. This fact suggests that the redactors chose texts which would create an impression of coherence within the cycle. Second, the order of the haftarot of consolation does not reflect the order of the canonical text. Isaiah 54:11–55:5 is the haftarah for the third sabbath of consolation. It is followed by Isa 51:12–52:12 and Isa 54:1–10. While rabbinic culture did subscribe to the dictum “there is no before or after in Torah,” the fact that the redactors of the lectionary cycle separated and reversed the order of two consecutive texts suggests that they were operating according to some intentional principles of arrangement. Ultimately though, the degree of intentionality underlying the lectionary cycle is irrelevant to my project. My analyses will demonstrate that the literary structures which undergird the cycle as a whole and the literary relationships which connect individual texts to one another generate meaning within the cycle and serve as vehicles for the articulation of theological and ideological assertions.

Lectionary Poetics

There are no precise Jewish literary parallels to the Tisha b’Av cycle. While the cycle shares some features with individual parashah/haftarah pairs from other parts of the lectionary, its scope is far greater than the scope of any of these pairs. In addition, while the conjunctions of the parashah/haftarah texts are motivated by verbal and/or thematic correspondences, they are not marked by the same degree of structural coherence as the larger cycle. The Tisha b’Av cycle also bears some resemblance to other sequences of biblical pericopes which occur within the liturgy, most notably, the shema and the pesukei dezimra. Like the Tisha b’Av lectionary

15. See pp. 61–66 for a discussion of Second Isaiah’s allusions to Lamentations.
16. Other liturgical compositions, such as the malkhuyot, zikronot, and shofarot sections of the Rosh Hashanah liturgy and the medieval additions to the pesukei dezimra consist of concatenations of single biblical verses. While these compositions share some important features with the lectionary sequence, they are distin-
cycle, these units are sequences of biblical texts which have been arranged in a new order in their liturgical settings. In both of these cases, the re-ordering of the material shapes the meaning of the new, liturgical composition. For example, m. Ber 2:2 understands the order of the first two paragraphs of the shema to reflect the order of the worshiper’s submission to God. First one accepts the authority of God’s kingship and then that of the commandments. However, neither of these texts provide precise parallels to the Tisha b’Av cycle: While the order of the shema certainly affects its meaning, its arrangement is not nearly as elaborate or exegetically powerful, and while the pesukei dezimra is a more elaborate composition, it was formed through the gradual aggregation of thematically related texts; it was not constructed as a coherent unit.

Although it is not a precise parallel, the genre of anthology bears a resemblance to the lectionary cycle, and the study of anthologies provides a starting point for my analysis of the cycle’s poetics. Like the lectionary sequence, anthologies “present themselves consciously and openly as collections of preexisting sources and traditions.” In addition, while anthologies reproduce their constituent texts verbatim, the inclusion and arrangement of the texts within the anthology can affect and transform their meaning. As David Stern notes,

> Even anthologies that simply present texts “as they really are” (to paraphrase Ranke) can radically alter and shape their readers’ reception and understanding of their contents by placing them within the anthological context in one place and not another.

Despite these similarities, lectionary sequences are not identical to other anthologies. Whereas anthologies’ primary identification is that of a collection, the Tisha b’Av lectionary sequence is a new, discrete text with its own narrative coherence and dialogic structure. Whereas the creation


18. For the history of the formation of the pesukei dezimra see Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, 72–76.


of an anthology is primarily an act of accretion, the creation of the lectionary first involves a process of extraction, whereby the lectionary texts are removed from their context in the biblical anthology and recombined in the lectionary sequence. Finally, the goal of the lectionary sequence differs from that of other anthologies. While the process of anthologization often subtly transforms the meaning of the anthologized texts, anthologizers do not attempt to appropriate the pre-existent texts and transform them into expressions of their own ideas and values. This is precisely the project of the authors of the lectionary sequence. Through the creation of the lectionary, they transform the biblical texts into “bi-lingual” texts: texts which continue to articulate the messages of the biblical authors but also become the constituent parts of the lectionary—a post-biblical text which preaches a post-biblical theology of consolation, which is foreign to the biblical canon. While the lectionary sequence is more than an anthology, anthological strategies provide a useful heuristic device for understanding the lectionary process. Like anthologies, the lectionary is created through a process of identification, selection, correspondence, and arrangement.

**Identification**

The conventions which govern the selection of lectionary texts determine the parameters of the Tisha b’Av lectionary. On the ninth of Av itself a hagiographical text may be read. On the surrounding sabbaths, the haftarot must be prophetic texts. In addition, the lectionary texts must address the events commemorated on the ninth of Av and the religious themes of the season. This final criterion is both the most elusive and the most interesting. By the mishnaic period, the seventeenth of Tammuz, the ninth of Av, and the period between them had been identified as occasions of both historical and supernatural doom and danger. However, the period which extends from the ninth of Av through the fifteenth of Av to Rosh Hashanah is not signified liturgically in the tannaitic literature. Consequently, there is no evidence that the seven weeks following Tisha b’Av had a “theme” to which the lectionary texts should correspond. Rather, the lectionary itself defines the significance of the seven week period. In addition, the lectionary defines the significance of the “three weeks” in a way which echoes, but is not identical to, the significance attached to this period in the mishnaic and midrashic sources.

21. B. Meg 29b.
22. See p. 29.
Selection

In the case of anthologies, two general motives govern the processes of selection: preservation and selection. David Stern identifies anthologies whose primary purpose is preservation as “archives.” At the other end of the spectrum lies the “anthology proper” in which “a very strong principle of selection regardless of desire for preservation is the operative criterion of inclusion.”

The lectionary cycle corresponds to this second type of anthology, which bears witness to a distinctive process of selection. When compared to the biblical books from which they are derived, it is clear that the haftarot of rebuke and consolation are not a representative selection or microcosm of the collections from which they come. Instead, the redactors of the lectionary cycle isolated pericopes from the biblical anthology which articulated certain themes. When compared to Second Isaiah as a whole, for example, the haftarot of consolation emphasize themes of consolation and downplay themes of rebuke. However, the process of selection differs from that of even an anthology proper. The haftarot of consolation do not represent the best examples of consolatory discourse in Second Isaiah. Rather, they are selected strategically to articulate the variety of positions and moments necessary to the cycle’s argument.

Correspondence

The principle of correspondence underlies the process of selection. Each anthology proclaims that there are correspondences among its constituent texts which were obscured by the texts’ prior transmission and dissemination. By bringing these texts together, the anthologist is able to reveal the relationships among previously scattered texts. The texts of the lectionary cycle are connected by a dense web of thematic and poetic correspondences. These correspondences were present in the biblical context as well, but they were obscured by the canonical arrangement of the biblical text. By bringing together these corresponding texts, the creators of the lectionary cycle assert that the texts have something to do with one another. The correspondences alone, however, are raw data. It is the particular arrangement of the corresponding texts which gives significance to the pre-existing correspondences.

Arrangement

“There is no anthological organization devoid of an ideological orientation. In the anthology, literary form, organization, even sequence, are all ideological subjects.”24 Even seemingly neutral anthological ordering principles such as geography, alphabet, and chronology bear ideological messages. An anthology that is arranged alphabetically by author identifies the individuality of the author as the most significant identifying feature of a text. An anthology which is organized chronologically necessarily suggests some form of teleology, be it of development, decay or transformation. The power of (re)arrangement is deployed even more strongly in the lectionary cycle. The arrangement of the lectionary texts provides the high degree of coherence that differentiates the cycle from anthologies. By arranging the biblical texts into a narrative and dialogic sequence, the redactors of the lectionary cycle highlight certain themes and assert that the correspondences among the texts are signs that the texts are part of a single story and part of a single consolatory conversation. Through the structures of narrative and dialogue, the redactors of the lectionary cycle transform the meaning of the texts and make them applicable to the contemporary situation of the post-70 CE Jewish audience.

Analysis of the Lectionary Cycle

Lamentations

The book of Lamentations is the anchor of the Tisha b’Av lectionary cycle. It defines the historical and theological significance of the ninth of Av within the liturgical complex and defines and articulates a communal, liturgical response to the events commemorated on the holiday. By designating Lamentations as the central lectionary text for the ninth of Av, the redactors of the cycle assert that the events of 587 BCE and, by extension, those of 70 CE, are the events which give meaning to the day of mourning and commemoration.25 This primary act of selection shapes the meaning of the Tisha b’Av season significantly.


25. The rabbinic literature often conflates the two destructions. Shaye J. D. Cohen (“The Destruction: From Scripture to Midrash,” Prooftexts 2 [1982]: 20) observes that in Lam R., the midrashists often do not identify which temple, destruction or enemy they are discussing.
Several rabbinic texts attest to the range of significances attached to Tisha b’Av and the weeks preceding it in ancient Jewish culture. From at least mishnaic times, the seventeenth of Tammuz and the ninth of Av were days of mourning and commemoration for tragic events in Israel’s past.

Five things happened to our ancestors on the seventeenth of Tammuz and five occurred on the ninth of Av. On the seventeenth of Tammuz the tablets were broken, the tamid sacrifice was eliminated, the city was breached; Apostomos burned the Torah and he erected an idol in the palace. On the ninth of Av it was decreed that our ancestors would not enter the land; the first and second temples were burned; Betar was captured and the city was destroyed. Whoever enters the month of Av should lessen his joy. (m. Taan 4:6)

This mishnah reveals the mythic character of Tisha b’Av as a day of doom. The identification of the seventeenth of Tammuz and the ninth of Av as the dates of multiple tragic events is symbolic and paradigmatic rather than historical. The Bible does not indicate a precise date for the breaking of the tablets or for God’s decree that the exodus generation would not enter the land of Israel. In addition, the assignation of the destruction of the first temple to the ninth of Av contradicts two biblical accounts:

In the fifth month on the tenth day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of the reign of king Nebuchadrezzar, the king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan, the chief of the guards who represented the king of Babylon in Jerusalem, came. He burned the house of YHWH and the house of the king and all the houses of Jerusalem; every house of importance he burned with fire. (Jer 52:12-13)

This passage also appears in 2 Kgs 25:8-9, but there Nebuzaradan’s arrival occurs on the seventh day of the fifth month. While b. Taan 29a attempts valiantly to justify the Mishnah’s dating of both the pentateuchal events and the events of 587 BCE, the text also acknowledges the mythic, paradigmatic logic that underlies the Mishnah’s view of history. In commenting on the Mishnah’s assertion that the second temple was also destroyed on the ninth of Av, b. Taan 29a states, “How do we know this? It has been taught: Meritorious events occur on meritorious days and doom occurs on days of doom.” This suggests that the seventeenth of Tammuz and the ninth of Av were days of doom on which a series of catastrophes occurred over time. The dates themselves are catastrophic, so catastrophic events accrue on them. Lamentations Rabbah 1:3 further describes the

26. The reference to Apostomos remains obscure; the name does not appear in any other sources. Neither the Mishnah nor the talmudic passages which comment upon it elaborate on this “lessening of joy.”
mythic malevolence of the period between the seventeenth of Tammuz and the ninth of Av.

All her pursuers overtook her amid the narrow places. In the days of distress from the seventeenth of Tammuz to the ninth of Av in which ketev meriri (כֵּטֶו מְרִּירָה) is found. As it is said, “From the plague that walks in darkness and from the pestilence (בֹּקֶשׁ) that destroys at noon” (Ps 91:6). R. Abba b. Kahana and R. Levi comment. R. Abba b. Kahana says: It stalks through the midday period from the beginning of the sixth hour until the end of the ninth. R. Levi said: It stalks through the day from the end of the fourth hour until the beginning of the ninth. It does not walk in the sun or in the shade but in the shadow near the sun. R. Yohanan and R. Simon b. Lakish also commented. R. Yohanan said: It is covered all over with eyes, scaly scales and hairy hair. R. Simon b. Lakish said: One eye is located on its heart and anyone who looks at it falls down and dies. It happened that a pious man who saw it fell on his face and died. Some say it was R. Judah b. Rabbi. Samuel saw it and did not fall. He said: It is the snake of the house. R. Abahu was sitting and teaching in a synagogue in a place in Caesarea. He saw a man carrying a stick who was about to hit his neighbor. He saw a demon standing behind him who was holding an iron rod. He [R. Abahu] got up and restrained him [the man]. He said to him, “Do you want to kill your neighbor?” The man said to him, “Can a man kill his neighbor with this [stick]?”. He [R. Abahu] said to him, “There is a demon standing behind you with an iron rod. You hit him with this stick and he hits him with that one and he dies.” R. Yohanan warned elementary and Mishnah teachers not to use a strap on children in these days. R. Samuel b. Nahmani would warn elementary teachers and Mishnah teachers that they should dismiss the young children during those four hours.

In this text, three forms of malevolence are conflated. The demon, ketev meriri, is a figure of both natural and supernatural malevolence. It is a supernatural creature, but it is associated with the blistering heat of midsummer and stalks only during the hottest hours of midsummer days. The demon is also associated with human aggression which normally remains relatively restrained. Usually, when a man hits his neighbor or a teacher hits a student, the assailant can limit the damage through choice of weapon and restraint of his own force. However, ketev meriri serves as a disinhibiting force: he overrides the assailant’s restraint and caution and causes the death of the victim. According to this pericope, there is a con-

27. “Amid the narrow places” (גביו בּוֹקֶשׁ) is used as an epithet for the three weeks between the seventeenth of Tammuz and the ninth of Av.

28. A version of this pericope also appears in Num R. 12:3. Here the demon has “a head like that of a calf and a horn grows out from the center of his forehead and he rolls like a pitcher.”
fluence of natural and supernatural malevolent forces during the period between the seventeenth of Tammuz and the ninth of Av. Humans must take precautions not to fall victim to them. Thus, in the rabbinic sources, the seventeenth of Tammuz, the ninth of Av, and the three weeks between them are days of both historical and supernatural danger and misfortune. In the lectionary cycle, however, the cosmic and natural valences of the period are subordinated to a historical-theological paradigm. By designating Lamentations as the lectionary text for Tisha b’Av, the redactors of the cycle assert that of all the historical calamities and supernatural dangers associated with Tisha b’Av, the events of 587 BCE and, by extension, 70 CE, are central. According to the lectionary cycle, the catastrophes described in Lamentations, not the cosmic malevolence of midsummer, are the primary events commemorated on Tisha b’Av.

The designation of Lamentations as lectionary text not only defines the subject of the holiday, it also articulates a particular portrait and interpretation of that subject. To a large extent, the destruction of the temple and the conquest of Jerusalem as they are recounted in Lamentations determine the contours of the rest of the lectionary anthology. The redactors of the lectionary cycle surround Lamentations with a sequence of prophetic texts which serve to both anticipate and respond to Lamentations’ portrayal of the catastrophes of Tisha b’Av. Within the biblical anthology, these prophetic texts correspond to varying degrees to the text of Lamentations. Within the lectionary anthology, however, these biblical correspondences are brought to a new, explicit level. The resonances between Lamentations and the haftarot of rebuke and consolation form the infrastructure for the lectionary’s treatment of, and response to, Lamentations. A literary reading of the texts of the cycle both underscores these correspondences and reveals their significance within the lectionary cycle.

Lamentations presents a vivid and harrowing portrait of the events of 587 BCE. According to the text, the tragedies caused by the Babylonian conquest include the starvation and death of the populace (1:11, 19; 2:11–12, 20–21; 4:3–10; 5:4–5, 9–10) and the exile of the survivors (1:3–5, 18; 2:9; 4:15). The text laments the destruction of the Temple (2:1, 4, 6–7; 5:18) and describes the mourning and despair of the city’s inhabitants. Zion’s empty roads are a sign of her devastation (1:1, 4; 4:18) and the walls of the city itself mourn the destruction (2:8, 18). While Zion suffers, her enemies benefit from, and rejoice over, her misery (1:2, 5, 8–10, 21; 2:15–16, 22). Throughout the text, the effects of siege, war and exile are described with powerful pathos. Lamentations 2:10–13 provides an eloquent example:

They sit on the ground and are silent, the elders of the daughter of Zion,
They raise dust on their heads and gird sackcloth;
They lower their heads to the ground, the maidens of Jerusalem.

My eyes overflow with tears, my insides are in tumult;
My heart is poured out on the ground over the shattering of the daughter of my people,
As the infants and the sucklings faint away in the streets of the city.²⁹

They say to their mothers, “Where are grain and wine?”
As they faint like the wounded in the streets of the city;
As their lives run out on their mother’s breasts.

What can I compare to you? To what can I liken you, O daughter Jerusalem?
What can I compare to you that I might comfort you, maiden daughter Zion?
For as vast as the sea is your ruin; who can heal you?

The choice of Lamentations as the lectionary text for Tisha b’Av identifies these images, and others like them, as the grounds for mourning and commemoration on the day of lament. According to Lamentations, Jerusalem’s inhabitants are not the only victims of the Babylonian invasion. The city itself, personified as a woman, is victimized by the invasion and both suffers and laments its consequences:

Alas! She sits solitary, the city, once great with people.
She has become like a widow, who was once great among the nations;
The queen of the nations has become a slave.

Bitterly, she weeps in the night and her tears are on her cheeks.
She has no comforter from among all her lovers;
All her companions have betrayed her; they have become her enemies. (Lam 1:1–2)

Throughout the lectionary cycle, the female personification of Zion, which is drawn so forcefully in Lamentations, will be a protagonist in the drama of the Tisha b’Av season.

Lamentations not only paints a particular portrait of the events commemorated on Tisha b’Av, it also articulates a theological interpretation of these events. The Babylonian conquest of Judea and the subsequent exile and temple destruction generated two distinct theological anxieties which left their mark on the Hebrew Bible. The exile suggested that the God of Israel was an impotent God who was unable to protect his temple and his

²⁹. The word יַמְסָא, which I translate as “my heart,” literally means “my liver.” I translate it as “heart” because here the organ is used to represent the seat of the emotions.
people from the Babylonians. While this anxiety is rarely articulated explicitly, its refutation occupies much biblical theology and historiography. Deuteronomy states in no uncertain terms that Israel’s historical situation is the consequence of her obedience or disobedience to God:

And if you diligently obey the voice of YHWH, your God, by carefully performing all his commandments which I command you this day, YHWH, your God, will grant you ascendancy over all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you when you obey the voice of YHWH, your God. (Deut 28:1)

But if you will not obey the voice of YHWH, your God, by carefully performing all his commandments and his statutes which I command you this day, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. (Deut 28:15)

The deuteronomic historian applies this theological principle to the history of the kingdoms of Judea and Israel. By insisting that the fortunes of the Israelite and Judean monarchies correlated neatly to the degrees of obedience and disobedience of individual kings, these authors articulated a clear theology of divine control over history. God, not politics, determined the fate of kings and kingdoms. Similarly, the exilic and post-exilic prophets repeatedly assert that God controls the workings of international politics. Foreign enemies who triumph over Israel are merely God’s vehicles for punishing Israel.30 While this ideology seems deeply counterfactual to modern ears, its theological benefits are clear. The deuteronomic theology asserts that the God of Israel is in control of history even when Israel’s enemies are ascendant. In addition, this ideology asserts that the universe is a moral system. Fortune and misfortune are not results of divine caprice, but rather are the consequences of moral and immoral behavior.

The book of Lamentations supports this deuteronomic principle. Throughout the poems, the speakers avow that the suffering of the people is a consequence of their sin.31 For example, Lam 1:5 states: “Her foes have become the head, her enemies prosper / Because YHWH has caused her to suffer for the multitude of her transgressions.” In addition, the poems consistently identify God as the agent of Israel’s suffering. “Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow which he dealt to me / which YHWH caused me to suffer on the day of his fierce anger” (Lam 1:12).32

While these assertions of divine control of history counter anxieties about divine impotence, they spawn a second theological problem. The

30. Examples in Isa 40–66 include Isa 41:2–4; 44:28; 45:1; 47:6.
31. Lam 1:5, 8–9, 14, 18; 3:42; 4:13; 5:7, 16.
32. See also Lam 1:13–15, 17–18; 2:1–8, 17, 20, 22; 3:1–18, 38, 43–45; 4:11, 16.
events of 587 BCE, as they are described in Lamentations, are catastrophic. According to the text, the Babylonians murdered, raped, deported and looted. In addition, the Judeans suffered from famine and shame and witnessed the destruction of their city, its social fabric, and their way of life. If these atrocities are the consequences of God’s anger, then God’s anger must be extreme—so extreme that reconciliation seems impossible.

Lamentations expresses two distinct positions regarding the possibility of a permanent rupture between God and Israel. Chapter 3 of the book assuages the concern on theological grounds and expresses hope for reconciliation. After lamenting the sufferings that God has inflicted, the speaker has a change of heart and invokes a series of conventional arguments against the possibility of divine abandonment. God is essentially compassionate and just; misfortunes are finite divine punishments, not arbitrary or permanent divine acts:

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope;  
The steadfast love of YHWH never ceases;  
His compassion never comes to an end. (Lam 3:21–22)\textsuperscript{33}

For YHWH will not cast off for ever;  
Rather, he inflicts suffering and has compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love.  
For he does not afflict of his own accord or grieve the sons of men. (Lam 3:31–33)\textsuperscript{34}

These verses employ two distinct strategies to allay the anxiety. First, even though God is causing the speaker to suffer now, God’s past compassionate acts are signs of God’s true, compassionate nature. Since God has treated the speaker well in the past and responded to his pleas, the speaker can assume, or at least hope, that God will respond to him again. “I called on your name, O Lord, from the pit of the lowest places / You heard my plea; do not deafen your ears to my relief, to my cry ” (Lam 3:55–56).\textsuperscript{35} This strategy of consolation is common in the Psalms. In both

\textsuperscript{33} Reading הָעַמְּנָו from the root חָמְנָו. According to Ibn Ezra, the nun is in place of the doubled mem.

\textsuperscript{34} The translation of קַלָפְּנָו as “of his own accord” rather than the more common “willingly” is influenced by the covenantal nuances of the word רַחְשַׁם (steadfast love). In his comment on this verse, Rashi notes that God does not inflict suffering “from his heart.” Rather, the people’s sins cause their suffering.

\textsuperscript{35} The phrase לַיְּכָה לֵשׁוֹנֹת is difficult. The Septuagint translates the phrase, “to my supplication.” See Bertil Albrektson, Studies in the Text and Theology of the Book of Lamentations (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1963), 164 for a discussion of the Septuagint version. The targum translates לַיְּכָה לֵשׁוֹנֹת, “[And now you will not shut your ear from hearing] my prayer in order to release me on account of
They will confess their guilt and the guilt of their fathers—for the treachery which they performed against me and because they walked in opposition to me. Yea, I will walk in opposition to them and I will bring them to the land of their enemies. Then their uncircumcised hearts will be humbled and their guilt will be forgiven. Then I will remember my covenant with Jacob and also my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham I will remember, and I will remember the land.

God, like Israel, is bound by the terms of the contract. If Israel repents, God will restore its fortunes. If God punishes and has compassion according to his covenantal love, then both the punishment and the compassion are influenced and shaped by the covenant. Neither one is arbitrary or capricious.

Thus, Lam 3 echoes consolations which are common elsewhere in the Bible. God’s past acts of compassion are evidence of God’s essential goodness. Consequently, God can be depended upon to act compassionately again. At the same time, the chapter asserts that God’s love is a covenantal love. Therefore, the catastrophes bemoaned throughout Lamentations must be punishments that are limited by the terms of the covenant rather

my plea.” נמיה appears elsewhere only in Exod 8:11, where it means “relief.” Many commentators, including Abraham Cohen (The Five Megilloth [London: Soncino, 1946]) and Claus Westermann (Lamentations [trans. C. Muenchow; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994]), translate נמיה as a synonym for יבשיטי. Delbert Hillers (Lamentations [AB 7a; Garden City: Doubleday, 1972]) emends יבשיטי to יבשйтיה and translates the phrase “Do not close your ears—to relieve me—to save me.” I have chosen to translate the verse as literally as possible, although I think that “cry for relief” would also capture the meaning of the phrase.

than unbounded acts of fury. Within Lamentations, these theological arguments are accompanied by a surge of optimism on the part of the speaker. In Lam 3:21 attention to these theological assertions causes the speaker to have hope. In 3:58–64 he is optimistic enough to ask God to avenge his enemies, and in 3:58–59 he states: “You, Lord, have argued my case; you have redeemed my life / You, YHWH, have seen my suffering, vindicate my right!” By the end of the chapter, the speaker is confident enough in future reconciliation that he is able to ask God for help.

The covenantal optimism of chapter 3 is not the dominant theme of Lamentations. Chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5 are unrelenting expressions of grief and despair, devoid of consolations and expressions of hope. In his commentary on Lamentations, Westermann notes how these chapters deviate from the other communal laments in the Bible. Communal laments usually include units of complaint, supplication and praise. In the complaint sections, the speaker bemoans his current situation and then uses strategies of praise and supplication to try to invoke a response from God. According to Westermann, the lament form allows the speaker to express anger and a sense of alienation from God while affirming an ongoing relationship and expressing hope for reconciliation and restoration. The accusatory units express the negative feelings while the sections of praise and supplication affirm God’s compassionate nature and testify to the fact that the speaker still feels in relationship with God. In his analysis of Lamentations, Westermann identifies chapters 1, 2 and 4 as communal laments which have been influenced by the genre of the dirge. As a result of this influence, the laments in Lamentations devote an uncharacteristic amount of space to descriptions of misery and accusations against God. The poems also reduce or omit entirely expressions of praise and supplication. In other words, the majority of laments in Lamentations deviate from the communal lament genre in that they are primarily expressions of alienation and abandonment which are not tempered by the expressions of connection and reliance which are intrinsic to the communal lament genre. Westermann’s analysis of the final verses of the text provides a characteristic example. Westermann identifies 5:21, “Return us to you, 

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37. Westermann, Praise, 52.
38. Westermann, Lamentations, 93.
39. Westermann notes that the two conventional elements of petition—a plea for divine attention and a plea for restoration—occur together only in chapter 5. Elsewhere, the speakers plead only for divine attention or for the punishment of Zion’s enemies. He also notes that 5:19 is the only statement of praise outside of chapter 3.
40. Lamentations’ thoroughgoing fatalism makes it anomalous among Ancient Near Eastern city laments as well. See F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, Weep, O Daughter of
YHWH, so that we may return. Renew our days as of old,” as the only petition for restoration in chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5:

Where God can be addressed in this fashion, it is no longer necessary for the speaker to remain trapped and unconsolled in a desperate situation. Still, in v. 22 there follows an anxious question, one that runs contrary to the whole tradition of the concluding verses of the communal laments. Tersely put, “have you totally rejected us?” Nothing could more forcefully depict the situation in which this particular song of lamentation arose. Nothing could more poignantly express the solemnity with which the survivors voiced the lament.41

In addition, Lamentations 1, 2, 4 and 5 also ignore the potential consolations which are implicit in the Bible’s covenant theology. While chapter 3 underscores the temporally limited nature of covenantal punishment, chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5 emphasize the brutality of God’s wrath:

YHWH has destroyed without mercy all the dwellings of Jacob. He has torn down in his wrath the strongholds of the daughter of Judah . . .

He has cut down in fierce anger the horn of Israel; He has drawn back his right hand from before the enemy; He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire, consuming all around. (Lam 2:2–3)

If God’s actions are manifestations of divine fury, then there is no assurance that the suffering will ever end. Once, in 4:22, the text considers the possibility that there is a finite amount of punishment which corresponds to Israel’s sins. “The punishment of your guilt, O daughter of Zion, is accomplished, he will not continue to exile you.” However, the entire book ends with the fear that the God who reigns eternally might be angry for all time: “Rather, you have utterly rejected us, you have raged against us exceedingly” (Lam 5:22).42


41. Westermann, Lamentations, 217; my emphasis.

42. The particle or ה makes this verse notoriously difficult to translate. It often functions to contradict what precedes it (Deut 7:5; 1 Sam 8:19). In other cases, it restricts what precedes it (Gen 32:27). These usages suggest translations such as “Unless you have rejected us . . .” or “Rather, you have rejected us.” The RSV translation, “Or have you utterly rejected us?” attempts to capture the meaning of “unless you have rejected us . . .” in more poetic form. Robert Gordis argues in his article “The Conclusion of the Book of Lamentations [5:22]” (JBL 93 [1974]: 289–93) that the phrase should be read “even if, although” on the basis of its usage in Isa 10:22, Jer 51:14 and Amos 5:22. Other interpreters read ה as an emphatic:
The presence of these two conflicting attitudes in Lamentations has led to debate over the meaning of the book as a whole. For many scholars, chapter 3 is the crux of Lamentations and articulates its deepest theological truths. For these critics, the speaker in Chapter 3 is finally able to move beyond lament and see the larger deuteronomic picture. Israel has been punished for its sins but God’s mercy is everlasting and gives grounds for hope and motivation for repentance. Delbert Hillers serves as a representative example. After describing the theocentric explanation of catastrophe proffered throughout Lamentations, Hillers states:

Central to the book, however, is an expression of hope. . . . the book offers, in its central chapter, the example of an unnamed man who has suffered under the hand of God. . . . From near despair, this man wins through confidence that God’s mercy is not at an end, and that his final, inmost will for man is not suffering. From this beginning of hope the individual turns to call the nation to penitent waiting for God’s mercy.

Claus Westermann resists this optimistic reading of Lamentations. Although he is unwilling to acknowledge the full theological implications of Lamentations’ deviation from the genre of communal lament, Westermann does reject the identification of chapter 3 as the essence of the book. Westermann insists that Lamentations should be read as a lament—an emotional reaction to suffering, rather than as a didactic text or a program for coping with misfortune.

The scholars who view chapter 3 as the essence of Lamentations point to its placement in the center of the book as a sign of its importance. However, as Tod Linafelt notes, these scholars do not take into account the fact that the last two chapters of Lamentations revert to the hopelessness of the earlier chapters. Despite the tentative optimism of the middle chapter, the book ends on a note of plaintive despair in which the speaker doubts the possibility of divine-human reconciliation:

“Indeed!” The Septuagint emends the verse by omitting the particle altogether. The resulting phrase is “For you have certainly rejected us. . . .” I have chosen the reading “rather” because it best preserves both the emphatic and reversing functions of ὅτι οὐ.

44. Hillers, Lamentations, xvi.
45. Westermann, Lamentations, 78–79.
But you, YHWH are enthroned forever; your throne endures for eternity. Why have you forgotten us forever? Abandoned us for all time? Return us to you, YHWH, so that we may return. Renew our days as of old. Rather, you have utterly rejected us, you have raged against us exceedingly. (Lam 5:19–22)

In the final two chapters of Lamentations the consolation and optimism of chapter 3 are suspended. The speaker feels so abandoned by God that he fears that the abandonment may last forever. His grief and despair over the destruction of Jerusalem are so overwhelming that the brief moment of optimism and consolation expressed in chapter 3 cannot be sustained.

Summary

As the lectionary text for Tisha b’Av, Lamentations identifies the destruction(s) of the temple and Jerusalem as the catastrophe commemorated on the holiday. The historical grounds for lament include the suffering of the city’s population, the destruction of the temple and the exile of the Judeans from the city. In addition, the sufferings of personified Zion herself are grounds for lament and commemoration. Lamentations also articulates potent theological anxieties which were raised by the events of 587 BCE and 70 CE. If Zion’s misfortunes are a result of divine fury, then the intensity and duration of those misfortunes suggest that God’s anger is fierce and potentially unbounded. From the standpoint of the speaker in Lamentations, it appears as though God and Israel might never be reconciled again. Finally, Lamentations gives voice to overwhelming grief and despair over the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem and devastation of her inhabitants. According to the lectionary cycle, the emotional tenor of the holiday is one of utter despair.

Haftarot of Rebuke and Consolation

The designation of Lamentations as the lectionary text for Tisha b’Av identifies the significance of the holiday, its theological implications and its emotional tenor in a particular way. According to the lectionary cycle, it is not a day marked by timeless, supernatural, malevolent forces. Instead it is a day which marks Israel’s historical catastrophes and laments the divine anger and alienation which seem to be manifested by those events. This particular delineation of Tisha b’Av determines the significance of the surrounding season. The lectionary cycle defines the periods preceding and following the holiday according to the same historical-
theological-historical paradigm. The three weeks preceding the holiday are identified with the periods preceding the catastrophes of 587 BCE and 70 CE. The haftarot of rebuke not only chastise Israel for wrongdoing, they also warn the people of the disasters which are to come. The seven weeks following the holiday are identified with the redemptive future which will follow the disasters’ aftermath. The haftarot surrounding Tisha b’Av not only elaborate on, and participate in, the theological-historical paradigm; they also respond to the emotions and theological anxieties raised by Lamentations. Through the strategic selection and arrangement of haftarot, the re-dactors of the lectionary cycle assert the validity of the covenantal para-digm, counter the accusation of ongoing divine abandonment, and enact a process of consolation in which the community, as represented by Zion herself, moves from grief and alienation to consolation and reconciliation.

The tripartite structure of the lectionary cycle forms a narrative which defuses Lamentations’ anxiety that God and Israel are permanently estranged. The three sections of the lectionary cycle articulate a narrative of sin-punishment-restoration. The three haftarot of rebuke decry Israel’s numerous transgressions. Jeremiah 1:16 and 2:4–28 accuse Israel of straying from the God of Israel and worshiping other gods. Isaiah 1 accuses the people of forsaking God (v. 4) and of performing rituals while behaving immorally (vv. 11–17). The text also targets the immorality of Israel’s leaders (v. 23). The haftarot of rebuke not only describe Israel’s sins, they also warn the people of the disastrous consequences of continued transgression:

Then YHWH said to me:
Out of the north misfortune will break out on all the inhabitants of the land.
For here I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, says YHWH;
And they shall come and each of them shall set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem;
Against all its surrounding walls and against all the cities of Judah.
And I will utter my judgments against them, for all their wickedness—because they forsook me;
And offered incense to other gods and prostrated themselves before the work of their hands. (Jer 1:14–16)47

Within the lectionary cycle, the haftarot of rebuke are followed by Lamentations. Within the cycle’s narrative, Lamentations describes the catastrophes which occurred as punishment for the sins decried in the hafta-

47. See also Isa 1:5–9, 19–20, 24–25.
rot of rebuke. Thus far, the lectionary cycle as a whole concurs with Lamentations’ conviction that Israel’s misfortune is the consequence of its sins. However, whereas Lamentations ends on a note of fatalistic despair, the lectionary sequence does not end with Lamentations. Instead, the recitation of Lamentations is followed by seven weeks of consolation and promises of redemption and restoration. In its biblical context, Lamentations suggests that Israel’s narrative ends with catastrophe and alienation from God. The lectionary cycle assures its audience that catastrophe is the fulcrum of the nation’s story, not its conclusion.

**Haftarot of Rebuke**

Within the lectionary anthology, the haftarot of rebuke are linked to Lamentations through both thematic and verbal correspondences. Through strategies of selection and arrangement, the redactors of the lectionary cycle use these correspondences to articulate particular theological messages. Within the cycle, the haftarot of rebuke articulate the sin segment of the sin-punishment-restoration narrative. In addition, the conjunction between the haftarot of rebuke and Lamentations itself serves to justify God’s punishment of Israel. The conjunction also serves to assert the reliability of the prophetic word.

*Jeremiah 1:1–2:4*

The first haftarah describes Jeremiah’s prophetic commission and recounts the content of his first prophetic vision: an omen of the invasion of the Babylonians. It also establishes the prophet’s credentials and introduces the theme of the reliability of the divine word. This text is linked to Lamentations through both the traditional identification of Jeremiah as the author of Lamentations and through literary correspondences between the two texts. Like Lamentations, this passage includes images of destruction and siege (1:10, 15) and portrays Jerusalem in sexualized female terms (2:2–3).

*Jeremiah 2:4–28, (4:1–2)*

The second haftarah is the most vituperative of the three haftarot of rebuke. The text is a scathing condemnation of the sins of Israel’s ancestors.
as well as those of the current generation. Throughout the text, the prophet condemns Israel’s worship of other gods and its reliance on foreign nations. In the context of a holistic reading of the lectionary cycle, the enumeration of the people’s sins in this pericope resonates with the unspecified sinfulness of Zion in Lamentations (Lam 1:5, 8–9, 14, 18; 2:14; 3:42; 4:13; 5:7, 16). The description of Israel’s polytheism as a form of nymphomania in Jer 2:20–26 resonates with Lamentations’ sexualized representations of the invasion of Jerusalem, and of Zion’s relationship with other nations.

**Isaiah 1:1–27**

The parameters of the earliest form of this haftarah are difficult to determine. The chapter in PRK which corresponds to the third sabbath of rebuke is a composite chapter which deals with both Lam 1:1 and Isa 1:21. The poems of Yannai and Kallir also identify Lam 1:1 as the lectionary verse. However, the tosafists state that the Pesikta designates Isa 1:1 as the haftarah. This tradition becomes canonical in the major liturgical rites. The short and long forms of the haftarah which are attested in PRK and the later rites, respectively, manifest different types of correspondences to Lamentations.

The long form of the haftarah (1:1–27) condemns the Judeans for their sins and decries their obstinate refusal to understand that their misfortune is a result of their sinfulness (1:1–20). The last section of the chapter (1:21–31) decries the moral corruption of Zion and announces that God will punish the city for its immorality. This punishment will serve as a purification, which will in turn lead to the restoration and redemption of the city. This version of the haftarah manifests the sort of thematic correspondence which links the first two haftarot of rebuke to the rest of the lectionary cycle. Like Lamentations, Isa 1 speaks of the sins of the people (1:2–5, 21–24) and declares that the people’s misfortunes are, and will be, punishment for those sins (1:5–9, 25–26). It also deals with the subjects of the temple cult (1:13–15) and Jerusalem (1:21, 26–28). The short form of the haftarah (1:21ff) contains a more precise verbal correspondence to Lamentations. It begins, “Alas (רַעַת), she has become like a harlot, the faithful city.” This verse resonates strongly with Lam 1:1. “Alas (רַעַת), she sits alone, the city once great with people.” Both verses begin “Alas”; both de-

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“Although this statement is made with regard to the Torah portion and not the haftarah, the appending of positive verses at the end of otherwise pessimistic haftarot in certain rites suggests that the custom was extended to the haftarot as well.”
scribe the city in feminine terms, and both are succinct, poetic descriptions of the city’s reversal of fortune.

Within the biblical context, many of the correspondences between Lamentations and the haftarot of rebuke are quite unremarkable. Countless biblical texts enumerate Israel’s sins, predict doom, and make exhortations regarding the temple cult. In the context of the biblical anthology, these correspondences are merely signs that texts which are scattered throughout the biblical canon share common concerns which were central to the world view of the biblical authors. Within the lectionary cycle, however, these correspondences become the raw material from which a set of theological responses to Lamentations is constructed.

Sin-Punishment-Restoration

The conjunction of the haftarot of rebuke and Lamentations articulates the sin-punishment portion of the sin-punishment-restoration narrative discussed above. Within their biblical contexts, the warnings and rebukes of Jer 1:1–2:28 and Isa 1:1–26 are followed by more prophetic exhortations. In its biblical context within the Masoretic text, Lamentations is an isolated self-contained lament which is not linked meaningfully to the books on either side of it. In the lectionary cycle, however, the prophecies of rebuke are followed by Lamentations’ description of the devastation of Jerusalem. This lectionary arrangement presents the catastrophes lamented on the ninth of Av as the consequences of the sins, and the fulfillment of the prophecies, recited during the three weeks preceding the holiday.

While the haftarot of rebuke narrate the sin portion of the lectionary drama, they also foreshadow the entire sin-punishment-restoration narrative. In Jer 1:10, God appoints Jeremiah to “pluck up and pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” In its biblical context, this verse serves to soften the harshness of Jeremiah’s prophecy. By appointing Jeremiah to build and to plant, God informs the prophet’s audience that their future is not entirely bleak. The verse serves a similar function for the lectionary audience. It informs the worshiping community that the future contains building and planting as well as destruction. When read from the vantage point of the cycle as a whole, this verse not only injects a note of optimism into the prophecies of doom; it also foreshadows the end of the lectionary narrative. From the outset, the redactors of the lectionary cycle assure the audience that the destruction described on Tisha b’Av will give way to acts of restoration and renewed fertility. The verse’s foreshadowing is particularly potent because images of planting and building figure

50. In Christian bibles, Lamentations is placed after Jeremiah. This arrangement reflects the traditional attribution of the book to Jeremiah.

Similarly, the third haftarah summarizes the entire cycle in terms that resonate both with Lamentations and with the final haftarah of consolation:

Alas, she has become like a harlot, the faithful city!
She was filled with justice, righteousness dwelled in her; but now, murderers. (Isa 1:21)

Then I will restore your judges as they were at the start and your counselors as in the beginning.
After this they will call you “City of righteousness, faithful city.” (Isa 1:26)

These verses not only articulate the sin-punishment-redemption narrative. They also echo the corresponding parts of the lectionary cycle. The “alas” (אסropolis) of Isa 1:21 foreshadows the “alas” (אסropolis) which begins Lamentations. The renaming of the city in Isa 1:26 foreshadows the triumphant renaming of Zion in Isa 62:4: “You will no longer be called ‘Forsaken’ and your land will no longer be called ‘Desolate’ / For you will be called ‘My delight is in her’ and your land will be called ‘Espoused.’”51 Thus, the haftarot of rebuke form an essential part of the lectionary’s response to accusations of eternal divine estrangement and fury. By articulating the first segment of the overarching narrative and foreshadowing the narrative as a whole, they counter Lamentations’ anxiety that God’s fury will last forever.

Measure-for-Measure Punishment

The redactors of the lectionary cycle also use the haftarot of rebuke to assert that the catastrophes described in Lamentations are just and fitting consequences of Israel’s sins. Within the lectionary cycle, the correspondences between the texts of rebuke and Lamentations become signs of a precise measure-for-measure relationship between Israel’s sins and her punishment.

51. Here, the redactors of the lectionary cycle are capitalizing on one of the correspondences which links the pre-exilic and post-exilic sections of Isaiah to one another (Rolf Rendtorff, Canon and Theology: Overtures to an Old Testament Theology [ed. and trans. Margaret Kohl; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 158 n. 45). The redactors of the cycle use this correspondence, which serves a unifying purpose in the Book of Isaiah, to assert the coherence of the lectionary narrative.
Destruction of the Temple

Lamentations describes the destruction of the temple as an act of divine fury: “Alas, the Lord in his anger has beclouded daughter Zion / He threw down from heaven to earth the splendor of Israel / He did not remember his footstool in the day of his anger” (Lam 2:1–2). A few verses later it comments: “He has broken down his booth like a garden; He has destroyed his tabernacle / YHWH has rejected his altar, spurned his sanctuary” (Lam 2:6–7). This destruction of God’s own footstool/booth and tabernacle is the manifestation of God’s unbridled anger and a sign of the ruptured relationship between God and Israel. In destroying the temple, God destroys the prime symbol of his special relationship with Israel. In the context of the lectionary cycle, however, the destruction of the temple becomes the fitting punishment for the abuse of the temple cult. Isaiah 1:10–17 accuses Israel of empty ritual observance which is unaccompanied by moral obedience:

What are your many sacrifices to me? says YHWH.
I have had enough of your burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened calves;
The blood of cows and of sheep and of he-goats I do not desire.
When you come to see my face,
Who asks this of your hand, this trampling of my courts?” (Isa 1:11–12)

In light of this charge, the destruction of the temple is devastatingly “appropriate” to the people’s crime. Desecration of the festivals results in their violent abolition. The punishment embodied in the destruction of the temple is both punitive and preventive. The destruction of the temple and the mechanisms of the cult prevents Israel from transgressing in the particular fashion decried in Isa 1.

Rape of Zion

The conjunction of the haftarot of rebuke and Lamentations transforms the sexualized vision of the devastation of Jerusalem into another example of measure-for-measure punishment. Lamentations employs the trope of the female personification of Zion. This trope, which may arise from the genre of Ancient Near Eastern city laments, serves a multitude of rhetorical purposes. The personification of the city as a woman both humanizes and feminizes its destruction. The city becomes all the more pathetic and helpless. The personification of the city as a woman generates or facilitates the description of the invasion and destruction in sexual terms: “Jerusalem has sinned a sin; therefore she has become like a menstruant (רַחְמַת) /
All of her admirers despised her, for they have seen her nakedness / She can only sigh and turn (her) back. Her uncleanness is on her skirts . . .” (Lam 1:8–9). A few verses later, the invasion of the temple is described. “The foe has laid his hand on all of her treasures / Surely, she has seen nations enter her sanctum; about whom you commanded, they will not enter your congregation” (Lam 1:10). The language of the biblical text is steeped in sexual allusion. The term נָשׁוּב in 1:8 means “impure one” in its broadest sense but refers particularly to a menstruant. The subsequent reference to the uncleanness on Zion’s skirts supports this reading. The city is described as an impure menstruant who has exposed herself to a multitude of lovers. Now they have turned against her and all she can do is sigh and turn her back in an attempt to hide herself. The subsequent invasion of the temple is equally suggestive. The verb חָצָל (to enter) is also used in the Bible to mean “have sex with.” At the plain sense level, the phrase “surely, she has seen nations enter her sanctum” refers to the invasion of the temple. However, in the context of the sexual imagery of Lam 1:8–9, the phrase has a strong allusive character which continues the sexual motifs. It not only describes a military invasion, it also suggests images of sexual penetration. As Alan Mintz notes, this sexualized language is enormously powerful rhetorically:

The serviceableness of the image of Jerusalem as an abandoned fallen woman lies in the precise register of pain it articulates. An image of death would have purveyed a false comfort of finality; the dead have finished with suffering and their agony can be evoked only in retrospect. The raped and defiled woman who survives, on the other hand, is a living witness to a pain that knows no release.

Within the biblical context, this sexual language is generated by the persistent personification of Jerusalem as a woman in Lamentations. If the city is personified as a woman, then the stripping of its defenses and the subsequent invasion become imagined as the stripping and rape of the woman. In the context of the lectionary cycle, the sexual language of Lamentations resonates with the sexual language of Jer 2:23–25. The conjunction of the sexualized text of rebuke and the sexualized account of the de-

54. E.g., Gen 6:4, 30:3.
55. This sexual meaning is reinforced when the text is read by speakers of rabbinic Hebrew. By the rabbinic period, חָצָל (hand) becomes a euphemism for penis. Thus the beginning of v. 10 reads as a reference both to the grasping hand and the thrusting phallic of the enemy who invades the city’s most precious parts.
struction suggests that Zion’s sexual disgrace and violation is the “fitting” result of sexual transgression. The second haftarah of rebuke describes Israel’s ritual and political transgressions in terms of sexual infidelity and chronic nymphomania:\(^{57}\)

How can you say, ‘I am not defiled, I have not gone after the Baalim?’

Look at your way in the valley; know what you have done;
A running she-camel twisting her path.
A wild ass, desert-trained, snuffing the wind in her eagerness,
whose hot passion none can restrain;
None that seek her grow weary; in her season, they’ll find her.
(Jer 2:23–25)

By asserting that ritual “promiscuity” was one of Israel’s central transgressions, the lectionary provides a narrative, causal motivation for the ensuing sexual violation. The lectionary suggests that Israel was, once again, punished measure-for-measure. The consequences of her promiscuity were rape and humiliation.

Zion’s Isolation

The literary correspondences between Jer 2:4–28 and Lamentations also provide moral causation for the dual tropes of isolation and vulnerability that pervade Lamentations. Lamentations 1:3 states: “All her pursuers overtook her in the narrow places.” The violence of this “overtaking” becomes the dark consequence of Zion’s availability to all comers in Jer 2:24. Similarly, Lam 1:2 states: “She has no comforter from among all her lovers; all her companions have betrayed her; they have become her enemies.” In the context of Lamentations, the designation of “all her lovers” and “all her companions” is one of many tropes of totality, of devastation and isolation without exception. When conjoined to the accusation that

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“none that seek her grow weary” (Jer 2:24), the assertion in Lam 1:2 is no longer merely a statement of the extreme nature of Zion’s isolation but also another example of fitting punishment: If you have so many lovers, they are bound to desert and betray. Lastly, the accusation that Israel has abandoned God, articulated in Jer 2:5 (“What wrong did your fathers find in me that they abandoned me”), becomes the justification for the abandonment of Israel by God in Lamentations.

This literary reading of the Tisha b’Av cycle demonstrates how the redactors of the cycle use the correspondences among scattered biblical texts to assert a causal relationship among the texts. Literary motifs shared in common by the prophetic texts and Lamentations serve as evidence for a cause-and-effect relationship between the sins condemned by the prophets and the catastrophes suffered by Zion. Through the establishment of measure-for-measure correspondences between the texts of rebuke and Lamentations, the lectionary cycle asserts that the catastrophes bemoaned in Lamentations are fair and appropriate punishments for Israel’s sins. Through this assertion, the creators of the lectionary cycle counter Lamentations’ accusation that the events of 587 BCE are “cruel and unusual.” Thus, the conjunction of the haftarot of rebuke with the text of Lamentations not only places the catastrophes commemorated on Tisha b’Av within a sequence of events, it also asserts that a deep moral causality underlies that sequence.

Reliability of the Prophetic Word

Within the lectionary cycle, the conjunction of the haftarot of rebuke and Lamentations not only articulates a structure of cause and effect; it also establishes a paradigm of prophecy and fulfillment. The prophecies of rebuke themselves warned the people of the upcoming disasters and, in effect, determined their occurrence. The paradigm established by the conjunction of the two lectionary units asserts that what is prophesied will occur. In the early weeks of the Tisha b’Av cycle, this assertion is far from comforting. For audience members who are schooled in the ideology of the reliability of prophecy, the prophecies of doom can only lead to disaster. However, from the perspective of the cycle as a whole, the reliability of the prophetic word provides grounds for optimism and hope.

At a fundamental level, the efficacy of the lectionary’s strategies of consolation depends on the reliability of the prophetic word. The lectionary cycle articulates a chronological scheme which extends from past sin and catastrophe to future redemption. Within this chronology, the redactors of the lectionary cycle, along with the rest of the worshiping community, were situated somewhere between acute past catastrophe and future redemption. While the situation of the fifth- to sixth-century CE Jewish
community was nowhere near as dire as the situation described in Lamentations, it certainly was not as glorious as the redemption described in the haftarot of consolation. In addition, with the exception of a few periods of messianic fervor, the historical reality of the community did not suggest that redemption was imminent. Throughout much of Jewish history, the only grounds for hope for future redemption lay in the messianic promises of the prophets, and in beliefs in God’s ultimate forgiveness and compassion. If the words of the prophets were not reliable, then the community had little grounds for hope.

There is also a political rationale for the insistence on the reliability of the biblical prophetic word. Throughout the rabbinic literature, the rabbis repeatedly insist that prophecy came to an end during the biblical period. After the close of that era, divine revelation occurs through the study of Torah, not through direct divine revelation to individuals. This ideology identifies the rabbis as the primary conduits of the divine word. It is the Torah scholars, not the independent prophets or messianic aspirants, who communicate the word of God. The assertion of the reliability of the divine word is fundamental to this ideology of revelation. If the veracity of the prophetic word is questionable, then the rabbinic study and interpretation of that word is also unreliable.

The reliability of the divine word is asserted explicitly in the third haftarah of consolation:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts and your ways are not my ways, says YHWH. 
For as high as the heavens are from the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. 
Just as the rain and the snow fall from heaven, 
And there they do not return but instead they water the earth, 
And cause it to give birth and blossom, and they produce seed for the sower and bread for the eater; 
So will be the word which goes forth from my mouth; it will not return to me empty, 
But will do what I please and succeed in the purpose for which I sent it. (Isa 55:8–11)

The haftarot of rebuke contribute to the assertion of this ideology. The first haftarah recounts Jeremiah’s prophetic commission and states definitively that God is the true power behind his prophecies:

58. E.g., b. Sot 48b, b. Yom 9b, and b. San 11a.
Before I created you in the belly, I knew you; and before you came out from the womb, I consecrated you; I made you a prophet to the nations.
And I said, “Oh Lord, YHWH, behold I do not know how to speak for I am a lad.”
And YHWH said to me, “Do not say ‘I am a lad’; Because wherever I send you, you will go, and whatever I command, you will say.” (Jer 1:5–6)

Thus, the opening pericope of the cycle averts any accusations regarding the human source or human fallibility of the ensuing prophecies. Jeremiah’s commission shows that the prophet is merely an agent of God’s word and God’s will.60

By joining the haftarot of rebuke to Lamentations, the redactors of the lectionary cycle assert further “proof” for the reliability of the prophetic word. Within the lectionary cycle, the prophecies of doom in Jer 1–2 and Isa 1 are fulfilled in the catastrophes described in Lamentations. Jeremiah 1 foretells the invasion and siege of Jerusalem (1:13–15). Jeremiah 2 predicts the desolation of the land (2:15). Isaiah 1 also foretells the desolation of the land and the destruction of the people at the hand of God (1:7–8, 25). Each of these predictions is fulfilled in Lamentations. The fulfillment of the prophecies of doom in the early parts of the cycle set up the, as yet unproven, reliability of the prophecies of restoration in the latter part of the cycle. If Jeremiah’s and Isaiah’s prophecies of destruction and devastation were fulfilled, there is reason to believe that Isaiah’s prophecies of restoration and redemption will also come to pass.

Summary

Through the strategic selection and arrangement of the haftarot of rebuke, the redactors of the lectionary transform biblical prophecies of doom and destruction into essential parts of a consolatory structure. Although the prophecies of rebuke themselves do not offer much consolation, their function within the lectionary cycle is deeply comforting. When the haftarot of rebuke are placed before Lamentations and the haftarot of consolation, they form part of the narrative which assures the worshipping community that the catastrophes commemorated on Tisha b’Av and the state of divine displeasure and estrangement that they represent are only a tem-

60. For a discussion of this trope in the biblical prophetic literature, see Michael Fishbane, “Biblical Prophecy as a Religious Phenomenon,” in Jewish Spirituality (vol. 1 of From the Bible through the Middle Ages, ed. Arthur Green; New York: Crossroad, 1986), 62–81.
porary stage in Israel’s history. In addition, the selection of the haftarot of rebuke underscores the verbal and thematic correspondences between the prophetic discourse of warning and rebuke and Lamentations’ discourse of catastrophe. The redactors of the lectionary cycle use these correspondences to contextualize God’s acts of fury in Lamentations within a judicial framework. Although God’s punishments are brutal, they are calibrated in mode, if not in degree, to Israel’s sins. Finally, the recitation of the haftarot of rebuke in the weeks preceding Tisha b’Av asserts the reliability of the prophetic word. The fulfillment of the prophecies of doom becomes the grounds to assert the reliability of the prophecies of restoration.

Haftarot of Consolation

Like the haftarot of rebuke, the haftarot of consolation articulate a response to the theological challenges posed by Lamentations and by the ongoing political situation of the Jewish community in the fifth to sixth centuries CE. The haftarot respond to Lamentations’ despair over the destruction and exile by promising a future restoration and return. At the same time, the haftarot of consolation counter Lamentations’ accusations of divine abandonment by asserting that God and Israel are engaged in an ongoing intimate relationship. As is the case in the haftarot of rebuke, the articulation of these responses is effected through redactional techniques. Through the strategies of selection and arrangement, the redactors of the lectionary cycle create a consolatory dialogue between God and Israel which both enacts, and serves as evidence for, the reconciliation between God and Israel. The haftarot of consolation not only articulate and demonstrate grounds for comfort, they model an emotional journey from grief to consolation for the worshiping community.

Lamentations and the Haftarot of Consolation

In isolation, the haftarot of consolation are forward-looking texts. They describe vivid portraits of the future restoration of Zion and the return of the exiles. In the context of the lectionary cycle, these texts not only point toward a messianic future, they also respond retrospectively to the texts of Lamentations and speak to the contemporary needs of the worshiping community.

While most of the correspondences between the haftarot of rebuke and Lamentations seem to be the result of shared cultural concerns and a common cultural and literary milieu, the correspondences between Lamentations and the haftarot of consolation seem to be intentional allusions
by the authors of Isa 40–66. In *Studies in the Book of Lamentations*, Norman Gottwald states:

As Lohr indicated, the affinities between Lamentations and Isa 40–66 are numerous, and a close study reveals many more than he mentioned. Some of these are shared by other early writings and cannot be of much help in determining influence between the two books. But others are unique or nearly so, thus demonstrating to the satisfaction of the present writer that both Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah knew the Book of Lamentations.

Gottwald supports this assertion with a list of 28 words or phrases which are shared in common by the two texts. The most extensive treatment of the correspondences between Second Isaiah and Lamentations occurs in Patricia Tull Willey’s *Remember the Former Things*. Here, Willey employs a more sophisticated method for identifying and analyzing allusions within Second Isaiah. Like Gottwald, Willey cites cases of verbatim citation to prove that Second Isaiah repeatedly alluded and responded to earlier texts, including Lamentations. Once she has made a compelling case for allusion based on verbatim citation, Willey extends her analysis to explore the larger relationship between the alluding and alluded texts that contain the verbal parallels. Her analysis of the relationship between Lam

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63. Ibid.

64. She utilizes the methodology outlined by Richard Hays in *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). Hays outlines a seven-part “test” for identifying allusions. Availability: Would the author of the later text have had access to the earlier text? Volume and Recurrence: Does the author cite significantly large sections of the earlier text and does he refer repeatedly to the earlier text? Thematic coherence: Is there a relationship between the meaning of the echoed words or phrases? Here Hays does not insist on an identity of meaning. The later text might be revising or refuting the meaning of the cited text. Historical Plausibility: Is it reasonable to assume that the author of the later text could have intended the allusion as it is being interpreted? History of Interpretation: Have other readers seen the allusion? Satisfaction: Does the identification and interpretation of the proposed allusion make sense? Does it illuminate the meaning of the later text?
4:15 and Isa 52:11 provides a representative case. Lamentations 4:15 states, “Depart! Unclean! they call to them. Depart! Depart! Do not touch! / So they wandered and roamed for they said among the nations, ‘they will not continue to live.’” Isa 52:11 states, “Depart! Depart! Go out from there! Uncleanness do not touch / Go out from its midst! Purify yourselves! bearers of the vessels of YHWH.” First, Willey uses a philological method to determine conclusively that Isa 52:11 is an allusion to Lam 4:13. She notes that the imperatives רעש (depart!) and ועזרת אָתָר (do not touch!) are relatively rare in the Hebrew Bible and notes that the word_ACK (unclean) appears infrequently outside of the book of Leviticus. Isaiah 52:11 and Lam 4:13 are the only verses in which all three terms appear together. Consequently, it is unlikely that the correspondences between the two verses are coincidental.

On the grounds of these linguistic correspondences, Willey asserts that Isa 52:11 is an allusion to Lam 4:15. She then interprets the nature and effect of the allusion. Second Isaiah’s verse represents a sophisticated reversal of the Lamentations verse. In Lamentations, the exiles are figured as ritually unclean creatures who are forced to leave Jerusalem because of their impurity. In Second Isaiah, the exiles are now the ritually pure addressees who are commanded to leave the unclean city of their exile. The allusion asserts that the exile from Judea would be reversed by the exodus from Babylon. The exodus from Babylon also marks a return to normal conditions of purity and uncleanness. Once again, the Israelites are clean and they are exhorted to stay away from the unclean space and property of the gentiles.

Through her analysis of specific cases of allusion, Willey establishes that Second Isaiah knew Lamentations and regarded it as a text to be reckoned with. Once a literary relationship has been established between the two texts, it becomes plausible to read various forms of correspondence as allusions and responses. Willey observes that Second Isaiah alludes to Lamentations in a variety of ways—through verbatim citations, re-use of vocabulary clusters and through the treatment of similar themes. In some cases, the Second Isaiah text will allude in a concentrated fashion to a particular Lamentations text. In other cases, Willey argues that Second Isaa-


66. Benjamin Sommer (Prophet, 68) further notes that the splitting in half of the alluded verse is a common strategy of allusion in Second Isaiah.

67. Willey, Remember, 129.

iah echoes scattered texts within Lamentations. Without the more concentrated allusions to particular texts, it would be difficult to identify these cases conclusively as allusions. However, since the more concentrated cases of allusion establish a relationship between Second Isaiah and Lamentations, it becomes plausible to hear the more scattered echoes as intertextual allusions as well.69

The work of Gottwald, Kaufmann, Sommer, and Willey establishes conclusively that Second Isaiah alluded and responded to the text of Lamentations. These scholars have compiled extensive lists of verbatim correspondences between the two texts and have analyzed many of the correspondences in order to determine whether or not they can be considered intertextual allusions. The following list of thematic correspondences assumes the intertextual relationship established by these scholars. In some cases, the correspondences cited below are cases of verbatim echo; in other cases, they are thematic correspondences in which the same image is invoked in different ways by the authors of Lamentations and Isa 40–66.

I. Second Isaiah’s visions of restoration and redemption reverse the catastrophes bemoaned in Lamentations. In many cases, Second Isaiah’s vision surpasses the pre-exilic situation whose demise is lamented in the earlier texts.70


2. Lamentations laments the destruction of the temple (Lam 2:1–2, 6–7; 5:18) and bewails the effects of the invasion and siege on the population. Food is scarce; the people are starving and dying in the streets from both hunger and battle wounds (Lam 1:11, 19; 2:11–12, 20–21; 4:3–10; 5:4–5, 9–13). In Second Isaiah, the temple will be rebuilt gloriously (Isa 54:11–12; 60:7), food is plentiful (Isa 55:1) and the scenes of mourning and despair are replaced with sounds of joy and rejoicing (Isa 51:3; 52:7; 54:1; 55:12; 60:18; 61:10; 62:5). The punishment that Jerusalem suffered will be turned on her enemies (Isa 51:23; 60:14–16).


69. Ibid., 188–91.
70. Ibid., 239–41, for a more detailed discussion of this trope.
71. I cite examples only from the texts which are used as haftarot of consolation because these are the only cases which are relevant to the main part of this study.
3. The ascendancy of Jerusalem’s enemies and their mockery of the defeated city in Lamentations (Lam 1:2, 5, 8–10, 21; 2:15–16, 22; 4:19) are transformed into obeisance to both God and Jerusalem in Second Isaiah (Isa 49:22–23; 52:10; 55:5; 60:5–16; 62:2).

4. Lamentations declares that Zion has no comforter (Lam 1:2, 9, 16–17, 21). In the haftarot of consolation, God declares his intention to comfort Zion (Isa 40:1; 51:3, 12).

5. In Lamentations, the foreign nations witness Zion’s misery (Lam 1:7–8, 12, 18, 21; 2:15–16). In Second Isaiah, all people witness God’s redemptive power (Isa 40:5; 49:7, 23; 52:8; 62:2).

6. In Lamentations, Zion’s empty roads are a sign of her devastation (Lam 1:1, 4; 4:18). In Second Isaiah, the roads will be filled with returning exiles and pilgrims (Isa 49:19–20; 60:4–9; 62:10).

7. In Lamentations, the Judeans barter their treasures for food (Lam 1:11) and pay for water and wood (Lam 5:4). In Isa 55:1, water and milk will be free.

8. In Lamentations, prohibited gentiles enter the sanctuary (Lam 1:10). In Isa 52:1 God promises that Zion will never be invaded by the unclean and uncircumcised again.

II. In addition to these thematic correspondences, many of the dominant literary tropes and images of devastation in Lamentations are reversed in the haftarot of consolation.

1. In Lamentations, the elders of Zion sit on the ground and the maidens of Jerusalem bow their heads to the ground (2:10). The speaker in Lam 3 advises a similar strategy of repentance (3:28–29). In addition, God casts down to earth the majesty of Israel (Lam 2:1). In Second Isaiah, Zion is repeatedly exhorted to rise (Isa 51:17; 52:2; 60:1).

2. In Lamentations, fire is a dominant divine trope (Lam 1:13; 2:3–4; 4:11). In Second Isaiah, God is identified with water instead (Isa 54:9; 55:10).

3. In Lamentations, the walls of the city mourn (Lam 2:8, 18). In Second Isaiah, they shout with joy (Isa 52:9).

4. In Lamentations, Zion wears soiled clothing (Lam 1:9) and God wears clothing of anger (Lam 3:43). In Second Isaiah, Zion puts on her children like jewelry (Isa 49:18) and will don garments of majesty (Isa 52:1; 61:10). God will wear Zion like a crown (Isa 62:3) and will wear splendid garments to vanquish her enemies (Isa 63:1–2).

5. In Lamentations, the reversal of the city’s fortunes is described as the dulling of gold and the murder of her inhabitants is described as the spilling of sacred gems (4:1–2). In Second Isaiah, God will rebuild Jerusalem with precious stones and metals (54:11; 60:17).

6. In Lamentations, the people are described as orphans and as widows (5:3). In Second Isaiah, Zion is a fertile woman, re-esposed to God (Isa 54:1, 5–6; 62:4).

By selecting the haftarot of consolation from those sections of Second Isaiah which allude most consistently to Lamentations, the redactors of the lectionary cycle capitalize on potent, pre-existent correspondences between the two texts in order to articulate a theology of consolation which addresses the needs of the fifth- to sixth-century-CE community.

While Second Isaiah provides excellent material for the lectionary response to Lamentations, its theology does not provide full consolation for the Jewish community in the fifth to sixth centuries CE. In many ways, the theological situation of this community resembled that of the exilic community in the sixth century BCE. Like the authors of Lamentations and Isa 40–55, the Jews of the later period lived in the absence of both a temple and Israelite/Jewish sovereignty. While the situation which prompted the composition of Lamentations resembled, in some ways, the post-70 CE situation, the sort of historical circumstance which motivated Second Isaiah did not recur during the period of redaction of the lectionary cycle. Isaiah 40–55 was written after Cyrus’ ascent to power and on the eve of the return of the Judean exiles from Babylon. Unlike Second Isaiah’s contemporaries, who could reasonably expect a return to Judea, the Jews of Palestine and the diaspora in the fifth to sixth centuries CE had no reason to expect a return to Jewish sovereignty. The community did not live in a state of imminent messianic expectation. It did not expect that great his-

73. At least the rabbinic leadership which authored the surviving literature did not. It is difficult to know whether other classes within the Jewish community expected the messiah imminently.
historical change was going to provide a solution to theological dilemmas any time soon.74

This difference radically mitigates the consolatory potential of Second Isaiah’s message. In the biblical context, Second Isaiah responds to Lamentations by identifying and interpreting recent historical events as the “antidote” to Lamentations’ woes. In Lamentations, Zion complains that her city is destroyed, her God has forsaken her and she has no comforter. Second Isaiah interprets the advent of Cyrus and the imminent end of the exile as signs that God and Israel are reconciled and that Jerusalem will be restored. Through these historical events, Zion will be consoled; as the agent of these historical events, God acts as Zion’s comforter. Within Second Isaiah, Israel’s political situation serves as the barometer of her relationship with God. Exile is a sign of divine displeasure; return from exile is a sign of divine reconciliation. Thus, for Second Isaiah, reconciliation and redemption, and, consequently, consolation, are simultaneous events.75 According to this ideology, the situation of the Jews after 70 CE might have been interpreted in deeply pessimistic terms. The ongoing lack of sovereignty could have been read as a sign of continuing divine

74. Until the failure of the Jewish revolt in 135 CE, there was a high degree of messianic expectation among certain segments of the Jewish community as witnessed by the Dead Sea Scrolls, the New Testament, and references in the rabbinic literature to R. Akiba’s identification of Bar Kokhba as the messiah (Lam R. 2:2). The failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt seems to have led the rabbinic sages to discourage imminent messianic expectation. For a discussion of the rabbinic tendency to downplay messianic fervor, see Judah Goldin, “Of Midrash and the Messianic Theme,” in Studies in Midrash and Related Literature (ed. B. Eichler and J. Tigay; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988), 359–78. For a compendium of rabbinic messianic beliefs, see b. San 97a–99a.

75. Isa 55–66 also confronts the failure of earlier messianic expectations. The return to Judea had not been as glorious as had been expected and the post-exilic Judean society was far from perfect. In Isa 56–66, the author deals with this disappointment through two central strategies. First, he rebukes Israel for ongoing sins and misbehavior (i.e. 56:9–57:13). Second, he describes the restoration and redemption in even more miraculous and cosmic terms than the author of Isa 40–55. At the same time, he pushes the redemption into the future. The sixth haftarah provides a characteristic example. In Isa 60:1–22, God proclaims that the redemption will bring both political and cosmic change. The exiles will return and Jerusalem will gain ascendancy over the nations (60:4–12). She will no longer need the sun and the moon because God will be her light (60:19–20). In addition, the nature of the city and its inhabitants will be spiritualized (Isa 60:17–18, 21). However, these miracles are no longer imminent. Rather, they will occur when God decides that their time has come. The pericope ends, “I am YHWH. In its time, I will has-ten it.”
disfavor and alienation. Through the strategies of selection and arrangement, the redactors of the lectionary cycle transform texts of Second Isaiah into a consolatory collection which articulates an alternate reading of the ongoing political limbo. In the lectionary cycle, reconciliation is unhitched from redemption. Lamentations’ complaints about the destruction of the city and the exile of the people will be redressed gloriously sometime in the future. However, her accusation of divine abandonment and her complaint that “she has no comforter” (Lam 1:17) are addressed in the present in the midst of the worshiping community. Thus, through the strategies of selection and arrangement, the redactors of the lectionary cycle adapt the consolatory tropes of Second Isaiah to respond to the situation of the community in the sixth century CE.

The lectionary cycle includes copious promises of restoration and redemption that meticulously reverse Lamentations’ complaints. By the sixth century CE, however, these prophecies of restoration no longer represented immediate expectations. Rather, they were part of a complex of messianic expectation which, for the most part, was postponed to some indefinite time in the future. While this postponement of messianic expectation is not articulated explicitly by the lectionary cycle, it was part of the cultural milieu in which the lectionary cycle was developed.

The Dialogic Structure

Thus far, I have discussed the ways in which the redactors of the lectionary cycle shaped the biblical material into a narrative structure. Attention to this narrative structure highlights issues of plot within the cycle—the narrative tells a story of cause and effect, of prophecy and fulfillment. This narrative coexists alongside a second structure within the cycle. The conjunction of Lamentations and the haftorot of consolation and, in particular, the arrangement of the haftorot of consolation themselves, form a dialogue which unfolds in the period beginning with Tisha b’Av and ending at Rosh Hashanah. The dialogic arrangement of the haftorot of consolation is noted by the fourteenth-century Spanish commentator, Abu-darham:

It says in the midrash, in high language, that they decided to begin the haftarot of consolation with Comfort, comfort my people (Isa 40:1), which is to say that the Holy One Blessed be He says to the prophets, Comfort, comfort my people. The congregation of Israel responds to this, And Zion says YHWH has abandoned me (Isa 49:14). Which is to say, “I am not appeased by

76. The claim that the ongoing exile was a sign of God’s continuing displeasure with Israel was made by Christian polemicists as well. See Robert L. Wilken, The Land Called Holy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 143.
the consolations of the prophets.” And he says, *Arise, arise, don strength, arm of YHWH. Arise as in days of old* (Isa 51:9). And in the places where they recite *Unhappy, storm-tossed one, uneffaced* (Isa 54:11) instead of this haftarah, this is to say that the prophets respond and say before the Holy One Blessed be He, “Behold, the congregation of Israel is not pacified by our consolations.” To this the Holy One Blessed be He replies, *I, I am he who comforts you* (Isa 51:12). And he says further, *Rejoice, barren one who has not given birth* (54:1) and he says, *Arise, shine, for your light comes* (60:1). To this, the congregation of Israel responds, *I will greatly rejoice in YHWH* (61:10), which is to say, “Now I have reason to rejoice and be happy.” *My soul rejoices in God because he clothed me in garments of salvation* (Isa 62:10).

This lectionary dialogue is simultaneously consolatory and radical. Through the strategies of selection and arrangement, the authors of the lectionary re-characterize the voice of Zion and invest it with the authority that it lacks in Isa 40–55. In the biblical context, the voice of Zion/Israel is usually cited in a polemical context. The prophet, or God speaking through the prophet, cites Israel’s words in order to rebut them. In many cases, the rebuttal is a harsh one. In the lectionary cycle, the people’s voice is far more prominent both in terms of reliability and influence. The lectionary cycle gives the impression that God takes Israel’s protests and challenges quite seriously. The correspondences between Lamentations and the haftarot of consolation provide the most obvious evidence. The audience of the lectionary cycle would hear Lamentations recited on the ninth of Av and, in the weeks following, would hear God promise the meticulous reversal of Lamentations’ complaints. This sequence of lectionary texts would suggest that God was listening very carefully to Israel and that the precise nature of her complaints shaped the nature of the future redemption and restoration. In addition, the lectionary presents a theology of consolation that, while common to rabbinic literature, is absent from the biblical canon. Through the constructed dialogue between God

77. In PRK 16:8 Israel rejects the prophets’ consolations because they foretold doom as well as consolation and she does not know which to believe. At the end of the pericope God says to the prophets, “You and I will go together to comfort her.” Thus, “comfort, comfort my people (כְּפָנַי)” means “comfort, comfort, with me (כְּפָנַי).” In PRK, as well as in the parallel versions in PR 29/30 (139) and Yal 443, the pericope serves as a comment on Isa 40:1, not 51:12. The association of the tradition with Isa 51:12, however, seems to be more natural. In Abudarham’s version, the plain sense of the biblical verse serves as the punchline to the pericope, whereas in the extant midrashic versions 40:1 needs to be revocalized in order to serve as a punchline.

and Israel, the redactors of the lectionary assert that reconciliation is a present event which occurs independently of redemption.  

The Dialogic Paradigm and the Theology of Intimacy

According to the lectionary cycle, Israel’s voice not only shapes God’s presentation of the redemption and restoration, it also shapes the nature of divine consolation. The conjunction of the first two haftarot of consolation serves as a critique of the consolation proffered by Second Isaiah in its canonical form. The juxtaposition of the two texts suggests that during a situation of ongoing Jewish powerlessness, assertions of divine power and future redemption are not adequate consolation. The lectionary cycle, like Second Isaiah in its canonical form, begins with Isa 40:1:

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.  
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and declare to her  
That her time of service is over, her guilt has been expiated;  
She has received from YHWH’s hand double for all her sins. (Isa 40:1–2)

The pericope continues with God’s announcement of his triumphant return to Zion with the exiles in tow (Isa 40:3–5, 9–11). These announcements are followed by assertions of divine power which support these proclamations (40:12–26). The pericope ends with a masterful description of divine power:

Lift up your eyes and see, who created these?  
The one who brings out the hosts by number and calls each one by name;  
On account of his great strength and mighty power, not one fails to appear. (Isa 40:26)

In the Bible, Isa 40:1–26 is followed by a quoted challenge to divine power and justice. “Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel / My way is hid from YHWH and my just cause passes by my God?” (Isa 40:27). While v. 27 seems to be an accusation regarding both divine attention and divine justice, the prophet interprets it only as a challenge regarding divine power and responds with further proofs of divine potency and omniscience. “Have you not known? Have you not heard? / YHWH is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth; he does not faint or grow weary, his wisdom is unfathomable” (Isa 40:28).

79. This notion is not revolutionary within rabbinic Judaism. To the contrary, rabbinic Judaism is grounded in the assumption that the relationship between God and Israel continues despite the ongoing exile. The innovative move is the transformation of the Second Isaianic texts into a vehicle for this message.
In the lectionary cycle, Isa 40:1–26 is followed in the second week by Isa 49:14–51:3. The resulting sequence reads as follows. End of the first haftarah:

Lift up your eyes and see, who created these?
The one who brings out the hosts by number and calls each one by name;
On account of his great strength and mighty power, not one fails to appear. (Isa 40:26)

Beginning of the second haftarah:

But Zion says: YHWH has abandoned me, my Lord has forgotten me.
Can a woman forget her suckling child, not have compassion on the child of her womb?
These may forget, but I will not forget you.
Behold I have engraved you on my palms, your walls are always before me.
Your children hurry; your destroyers and your ruiners depart from you. (Isa 49:14–17)

In the lectionary cycle, the substance of the argument of Isa 40:1–26 is not challenged. Zion does not dispute the assertion of divine omnipotence. Instead, she rejects the consolatory power of the claim. Zion responds to Isa 40:1–26 by accusing God of abandonment. It is as though Zion says that divine omnipotence is not comforting without evidence of reconciliation between God and Israel.

The juxtaposition of the two texts transforms the status of Isa 40:1–26. It is no longer identified as an inadequate theological argument; it is identified as an ineffective consolatory strategy. Zion does not contest the validity of the claims of divine power, she refuses to be consoled by them. Within the context of the lectionary cycle, God’s response in Isa 49:15–16 becomes a divine revision of the first attempt at consolation. God replaces the portrait of himself as powerful captain of the heavenly hosts with a portrait of himself as the devoted lover of Israel. The cosmic portrait of God directing the stars at their stations is replaced by the shockingly intimate image of God engraving Israel into the flesh of the divine body. The shift in consolatory strategy is underscored by the parallels between Isa 40:26 and Isa 49:18. In the verse from the first haftarah, God commands Israel to “lift up your eyes and see” the stars, which are evidence of divine omnipotence. In the second haftarah, which opens with Zion’s disconsolate accusation of divine abandonment, God commands:

Lift up your eyes and see, all are gathered; they have come to you.
As I live, says YHWH, you shall put them all on as an ornament, you shall bind them on as a bride does. (Isa 49:18)

Within the lectionary, God replaces the failed discourse of divine power with the discourse of intimate restoration. The tropes of military might and creation are replaced with tropes of marriage and family. The tropes of sending out in martial order are replaced by tropes of ingathering and arrival.

By underscoring the differences between God’s first and second attempts at consolation, the redactors of the lectionary cycle set up a dynamic relationship between two distinct discourses of consolation: the discourse of historical redemption and restoration and the discourse of reconciliation and relationship. The assertions of divine power in the first haftarah and the attendant descriptions of God as creator, sovereign, judge, and military hero are part of the discourse of redemption. In these texts, Second Isaiah assures his audience that God is powerful enough to intervene in history and effect Israel’s redemption. The assertion that God is eternally devoted to Israel and the attendant rhetoric of parental, romantic, and otherwise intimate relationships are part of the discourse of reconciliation. God’s proclamations of devotion and attachment assure the audience that God still loves Israel and is devoted to her. The innovation of the lectionary cycle is the isolation of these two discourses from one another. It is their isolation, which is highlighted by their juxtaposition within the cycle, that allows for their temporal separation. God can testify to reconciliation and devotion even in the absence of historical redemption. The author of Maḥzor Vitry (twelfth century) noted this lectionary assertion. In commenting on the choice of 49:14ff as a haftarah, he states, “Even though she is destroyed, do not say that she is abandoned.”

The tension between consolation based on divine power and consolation based on divine intimacy and attention is articulated most clearly through the juxtaposition of Isa 40:1–26 and Isa 49:14ff. However, negotiation over consolation continues in more subtle ways throughout the cycle. Some of the features that I will discuss in this analysis are constructed through the processes of selection and arrangement. As in the case of the final lines of the first haftarah and the opening lines of the second, the juxtaposition of distant texts changes the meaning and functions of the texts. Other features are present in the texts in their biblical contexts, though the canonical arrangement of Isa 40–66 does not necessarily draw attention to them. The tension between the consolatory power of God as redeemer and God as intimate consoler, which is articulated in the first and second haftarot, heightens the audience’s awareness of these features throughout the cycle.

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80. Maḥzor Vitry, 224.
text. In the following analysis, I will read the haftarot of consolation through the lens established by the juxtaposition of the first two texts.

**Third Haftarah (Isa 54:11–55:12)**

Despite God’s protestations of devotion and promises of redemption and restoration in the second haftarah, Zion remains disconsolate at the beginning of the third. The juxtaposition of Isa 49:14–51:3 and Isa 54:11–55:12 suggests that the consolations of the second haftarah are also inadequate. In Isa 54:11 God addresses Zion as “Afflicted, storm-tossed one, uncomforted.” In the subsequent verses, God attempts to console Zion through promises to rebuild the city (vv. 11–13) and keep Zion safe and secure (vv. 14–18). After an exhortation to hearken to God (Isa 55:6–8) and an assertion regarding the efficacy of the divine word (vv. 9–11), the text ends with a divine promise to end the exile. The redemption of Israel will cause nature to rejoice and grow more bountiful. These supernatural changes in turn will serve as an everlasting sign to God:

> For you will go out in joy and you will be led in peace.
> The mountains and the hills will burst forth in joyous song before you and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.
> Instead of thorns, cypress will rise; instead of nettle, myrtle will rise;
> And it will be a testimony to YHWH, an everlasting sign which will never be cut off. (Isa 55:12–13)⁸¹

Within its biblical context, this verse articulates two of Second Isaiah’s common themes. The return to Judea will be a second exodus—similar to, but surpassing the first. In addition, nature will join in celebration at the moment of redemption. Within the lectionary cycle, these verses also resonate with the end of the first haftarah. There, nature in all its order was a sign of divine power. Here, nature will become a player in the relationship between God and Israel. In other words, in Isa 40:26 God’s power is the factor that determines nature’s behavior and is manifest in it. The relationship between God and Israel generates miraculous events in the natural world.⁸²

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⁸¹. Another possible translation of the verse is, “It will be for God’s name, an everlasting sign,” meaning that the growth of myrtle and cedar in the desert will serve to praise or bear witness to God’s name. See Westermann, Isaiah, 291.

⁸². Westermann (Isaiah, 292) notes that these verses articulate the unity of God the creator and God the redeemer. However, he does not emphasize the particularist nature of that conjunction here. Nature responds not just to God’s actions in history but to the vicissitudes of the God-Israel relationship. This notion is also
Fourth Haftarah (Isa 51:12–52:6)

The transition between the third and fourth haftarot mirrors the transition between the first and second. The declaration of God’s control over nature in 55:12 is followed by a shift toward a more intimate theology in the opening of the fourth haftarah. In Isa 51:12, God states: “I, I am he who comforts you.” Within the canonical arrangement of Isa 40–66, this text resonates with Isa 40:1: “Comfort, comfort my people.” Both texts use a trope of doubling and both announce the comforting of Israel. Commentators have observed the resonances between the two verses and have understood them as signs of a continuity of theme in Isa 40–55.83 Within the context of the lectionary’s concern for divine attention to Israel, not only the parallels but also the differences between the two texts become significant. In the first text, God assigns the job of comfort to a group of unnamed addressees. In Isa 51:12 God assumes the task of comfort personally.84 The ensuing pericope marshals the now familiar arsenal of consolation. It invokes God’s creative power (51:12–16) and promises that the time of punishment has ended and that the time of vindication has begun (51:17–23).85 In addition, it urges Jerusalem to rise from her mourning and prepare for the triumphant advent of God (51:17; 52:1–3, 7–9). The pericope ends with a vision of the return from exile as a new exodus:

Depart! Depart! Go out from there! Uncleanness do not touch; Go out from its midst! Purify yourselves! bearers of the vessels of YHWH; For you will not go out in haste, nor will you go in flight; For YHWH goes before you and the God of Israel is your rear guard. (52:11–12)

Here, Second Isaiah makes an obvious reference to the exodus, but once again, the new exodus will surpass the old. Here, the refugees will not leave in haste. Rather, they will go in security and calm. Instead of being accompanied by the divine manifestations of the pillars of smoke and fire, they will be enveloped by God himself. Within the biblical context, this

reflected in PRK 13:10. See pp. 94–96 for an analysis of this pericope and parallel sources.


84. This shift is noted by Abudarham as well as by the author of Malzor Vitry.

85. This section contains a dense web of allusions to Lamentations. For detailed analysis, see Willey, Remember, 159–65.
new exodus is clearly better than the old. However, in the context of the lectionary cycle the second “improvement”—the enveloping presence of God himself—serves as another assertion of greater intimacy by God.

Within the lectionary cycle, the assumption of divine responsibility for consolation in 51:12 marks a pivotal moment in the negotiation over consolation. The verse is placed strategically at the beginning of the middle haftarah of the cycle and there is a marked difference between the two haftarot which precede it and the two that follow. The second and third haftarah opened with the recognition of Zion’s ongoing despair. Both the fifth and sixth haftarah open with exhortations to rejoice.

**Fifth Haftarah (Isa 54:1–9)**

The fifth haftarah marks a shift in the process of consolation. In this pericope, central theological tropes are recast in the language of intimate relation. The pericope opens: “Rejoice, barren one who has not given birth / Burst forth in joy, shout gladly, you who did not writhe [in birth-pangs].” This exhortation suggests that God has become bolder in his attempts to console. He now dares to ask for rejoicing and shouts of joy. This boldness is followed by a pericope which depends nearly exclusively on the discourse of relationship, espousal and love. God assures Zion that the children of her destruction will outnumber the children of her espousal (Isa 54:1). God then declares that he, himself, is Zion’s husband (54:5). God even revises his theory of catastrophe and puts it in relational terms. Rather than stating that Israel’s time of servitude is over (Isa 40:1), this pericope states:

For like an abandoned woman and a woman of downcast spirit
YHWH called you;
And [like] a wife of a man’s youth who is cast off, says your God.
For a brief moment, I forsook you, but with great compassion, I will gather you.
In a flood of anger, I hid my face from you for a moment;
But in everlasting, steadfast love I will have compassion on you,
says your redeemer, YHWH. (Isa 54:6–8)

Within the context of the lectionary cycle, this verse, like Isa 40:1, serves to answer the query at the end of Lamentations. Once again God assures Israel that the estrangement was temporary but the reconciliation will be

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permanent. In contrast to Isa 40:1, however, God does not define the relationship between God and Israel in judicial terms; rather, he defines it as one of everlasting, intimate love. This pericope also ends with the assimilation of a universalist creation trope to the particularist relationship between God and Israel. God avows,

This is like the waters of Noah to me;
Just as I swore never to make pass again the waters of Noah
over the earth,
So do I swear never to be furious with you and never to rebuke you.
For the mountains may move and the hills may totter,
But my steadfast love will never move from you and the covenant of my peace will not totter,
Says the one who has compassion on you, YHWH. (Isa 54:9–10)

This haftarah, like the third, ends with the assertion that nature is not neutral, but is instead a trope in the service of the relationship between God and Israel.

Sixth Haftarah (Isa 60:1–22)

The sixth haftarah comes from the portion of Isa 56–66 which resonates most strongly with Isa 49–55. Consequently, it shares many features with the preceding haftarot. It begins with an exhortation to the personified city (Isa 60:1). It continues to address Zion in the second person feminine singular and continues to refer to the exiles as children (Isa 60:4, 9).

However, this pericope backs off from both the radical personification of Israel and the portrayal of the intimate relationship between God and Israel. The text presents a vision of a spiritualized, utopian Jerusalem (Isa 60:17–18) whose claim to fame is the temple (Isa 60:7, 13, 14). Consequently, the relationship between God and Israel is no longer described in romantic terms. In contrast to Isa 54:5, which states “For your husband is your maker,” Isa 60:16 states “Know that I am YHWH your savior and your redeemer, the mighty one of Jacob.” The lover/creator dyad has been replaced with the savior/redeemer pair. In addition, the male personification “Jacob” is invoked instead of the female personification “Zion.”

Elsewhere in the pericope, God is imagined as a light which both illuminates and radiates from Zion (Isa 60:1–3, 19–20). The introduction of these new divine images and the attendant retreat from the radical personification of the city and erotic representation of the divine-human relationship mutes the dialogic paradigm. The sixth haftarah serves as an abstract re-

87. This represents only a partial shift in gender because the rest of the verse uses the second person feminine singular form of address.
sponse to the earlier complaints, not a response which is imbedded in a
conversation and relationship between two characters.

This muting of Israel’s voice and consequent suppression of the dia-
logic paradigm is quite disjunctive. One might read the apparent dissolu-
tion of the personified Israel and the silence of her voice as a sign that the
resistance has been conquered. Zion’s position has been assimilated into
the dominant, divine voice. However, the lectionary itself resists this read-
ing. Throughout the haftarot, Israel is repeatedly exhorted to rejoice (Isa
40:9; 52:9; 54:1). According to these texts, the expression of joy is the litmus
test for the success of the consolation. In light of that exhortation, acquies-
cent silence is insufficient.

Seventh Haftarah (Isa 61:10–63:9)

Only in the final haftarah does the speaker vow to rejoice. The pericope
begins, “I will greatly rejoice in YHWH; my soul will rejoice in my God”
(Isa 61:10). Finally, after seven weeks of dialogue, the human voice has ac-
ccepted divine consolation. Israel has accepted the command to rejoice.
However, the cycle does not end with the vow of praise. In 62:1 the
speaker acknowledges that Zion has not yet been redeemed and vows to
pester God until he fulfills his promises of redemption. The subsequent
verses serve as a catalogue of those promises and, within the lectionary
cycle, as a reminder of the range of consolatory discourses. Zion will
adorn God’s hand (Isa 62:3; cf. Isa 49:14); Zion and her inhabitants will be
triumphantly renamed (Isa 62:2, 4, 12; cf. Isa 1:26); God has sworn by his
mighty arm (Isa 62:8; cf. Isa 50:2); Zion’s inhabitants will reap their grain
and wine (Isa 62:9; cf. Isa 55:1–2). The chapter ends with two allusions to
the first haftarah:

1. Isaiah 62:10 states: “Pass through, pass through the gates! Pre-
pare a road for the people. Build up, build up the path! Clear it
of stones.” This verse resonates strongly with Isa 40:3: “In the
wilderness, prepare a road for YHWH. Make straight in the
desert a path for our God.”

2. Isaiah 62:11 contains a direct allusion to the herald’s cry in Isa
40:10: “[Behold your redeemer comes], behold, his reward is
with him and his recompense is before him.”

Within its biblical context, this densely allusive chapter serves to link
the third, post-exilic section of Isa 40–66 with the earlier sections. Within
the lectionary context, it forms an *inclusio* to both the haftarot of consola-
tion and to the cycle as a whole. This framing device serves to reinforce
the coherence of the cycle and to underscore its teleology. In the final haft-
arah, the renaming of the city prophesied in the third haftarah of rebuke
finally occurs. Isaiah 1:26 promises, “After this they will call you ‘City of righteousness, faithful city,’” and Isa 62:4 states:

You will no longer be called “Forsaken” and your land will no
longer be called “Desolate.”
For you will be called “My delight is in her” and your land will
be called “Espoused.”

In addition, the advent of God announced in the first haftarah of consolation is reiterated. Chapter 62, however, does not end the cycle. The final pericope continues with a gruesome vision of God, returning blood-spattered from the vanquishing of Israel’s enemies (Isa 63:6). This vision is followed by the speaker’s avowal to remember God’s steadfast love and all that he has done for Israel on account of it (Isa 63:7). The final verse of the cycle asserts that “In his love and in his mercy He redeemed them / And lifted them and carried them all the days of old” (Isa 63:9). Thus the pericope opens with a vow of praise and continues with the protest that Zion is not yet redeemed. The protest then becomes an occasion to rehearse God’s redemptive promises. This unit is followed by a ghastly vision of vindication which in turn gives way to a nostalgic rehearsal of God’s past saving deeds. Thus, the final haftarah, like the juxtaposition of the first and second haftarot, highlights the contrasts between the rhetoric of reconciliation and the rhetoric of redemption.

The haftarot of consolation foreground the tropes of intimate divine relation and consolation. During the seven weeks following the ninth of Av, God repeatedly assures Israel that he has not abandoned her; he is her intimate partner and consoler. These assertions of divine attention are supported by the invocation of correspondences among the lectionary texts. The strategic redaction of the haftarot of consolation creates a text in which God responds quickly and meticulously to Israel’s complaints. In response to Israel’s accusation of abandonment, God revises his self-presentation and his presentation of the relationship between God and Israel. The resulting portrait emphasizes the intimate nature of the God-Israel relationship and even revises the tropes of creation and exodus to make them evidence of God’s intimate attention to Israel.

Finally, the fact of the lectionary dialogue itself supports the assertion that God and Israel are reconciled and engaged in an intimate, ongoing relationship. The haftarot of consolation take up nearly one-seventh of the liturgical year. For this seventh of the year, God and Israel are engaged in dialogue in the midst of the worshiping community. Whereas in the bibli-

88. This verse resonates with Lam 3:21–22, in which the speaker also calls to mind God’s steadfast love.
89. For a detailed analysis of this pericope, see p. 71.
cal context God often responds to Israel’s complaints and demurrals with rebuke or polemic, within the lectionary context God responds patiently to her stubborn disconsolation, returning week after week with new attempts at consolation. The enactment of this dialogue in the synagogue setting proves the cycle’s point. It provides experiential proof of the presence of God and the continuity of the covenantal relationship despite the ongoing reality of the exile.

The construction of this consolatory dialogue is one of the most powerful transformative moves of the lectionary cycle. By separating avowals of redemption from evidence of reconciliation, the redactors of the lectionary cycle unhitch these events temporally from one another. At some time in the future, God will use his sovereign power to redeem Israel from exile, vanquish her enemies, and restore Jerusalem. In the meantime, however, Israel can take consolation in the knowledge that God is intimately engaged in conversation with the community and is deeply attentive to the community’s emotional needs.

**Redemptive Nature of Divine Love**

While the redactors of the lectionary cycle refute the simultaneity of redemption and reconciliation that is so strongly articulated by the Isaiah texts in their biblical context, they reinforce a causal relationship between reconciliation and redemption which is only hinted at in the biblical context. In Second Isaiah, assertions of omnipotence provide the most prominent causal arguments for the inevitability of redemption. God has declared his intention to redeem Israel, and since God controls the universe, nothing can impede his will. The redactors of the lectionary cycle preserve this argument for the inevitability of redemption, although it is proportionally less prominent in the cycle than in Second Isaiah. While the redactors of the lectionary cycle downplay this argument, they underscore a second causal argument which is present, though less prominent, in Second Isaiah. Because the omnipotent God is the God who loves Israel, it is inevitable that he will use his power to redeem her. The creators of the lectionary cycle once again use the strategies of selection and redaction to make the point. In the fifth haftarah, the prophet states:

> Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; do not be confounded, for you will not be put to shame;

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90. The argument appears at least nine times in Second Isaiah, but appears only three times in the haftarot of consolation.

91. The redactors include every articulation of this argument in the lectionary cycle.
You will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will not remember any longer. For your husband (ךֵּלֶב) is your maker; the Lord of hosts is his name; And the Holy One of Israel is your redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. (Isa 54:4–5)

This text asserts that the powerful creator God and the God who loves Israel are one and the same. If this is the case, then Israel can be confident that the omnipotent God will use his power to redeem her.92

The repetition of the word נָכַל as a leitwort within the cycle communicates a similar message. The root נָכַל appears seven times in Isa 40–66. Six of these occurrences are included in the haftarot.93 The root נָכַל has two central meanings: “master” and “husband.”94 This congruence of meaning is particularly powerful within the lectionary sequence. Just as Isa 54:4–5 asserts that Zion’s husband is her maker, so too do the other uses of the word נָכַל remind the audience that in the case of God, husband and master are true synonyms:

You will no longer be called “Forsaken” and your land will no longer be called “Desolate.”
For you will be called “My delight is in her” and your land will be called “Espoused” (בעבר). For the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married (הָעָבְרָה).
For as a young man marries (לִבְרָה) a virgin, so shall your sons marry you (ךְֽלֶבָּה);
The joy of the bridegroom over the bride will your God rejoice over you. (Isa 62:4–6)

Not only is God Israel’s husband; he is also the master of nature and history. These two forms of mastery are inextricable. Consequently, God’s espousal of Zion is manifest in her restoration and redemption.95 The word

92. Isa 51:16 and 55:12–13 also assert a connection between God’s power over creation and his intention to redeem Israel.
93. Isa 50:8; 54:1; 62:4 (twice); 62:5 (twice). The root also appears in Isa 41:15, but does not mean “master” /“husband” there.
94. The nominal form can also mean “citizen” /“inhabitant” and can serve as a noun of relation. נְכֶל is also the proper name of a Canaanite god and appears in the names of various cities.
95. This trope appears in Hos 2–3 as well. There God describes himself as the husband of Israel, a wayward wife. God punishes Israel’s infidelity by making her suffer political and natural devastation. Their re-espousal in Hos 2:14–23 is manifest in renewed fertility, peace, and prosperity.
itself contains the conjunction of relationship to Israel and universal power that is underscored in the lectionary cycle.  

The strange redaction of the final haftarah makes the same point. At the beginning of the pericope, the prophet describes the relationship between God and Israel in highly eroticized terms (Isa 62:4–6). This unit is followed by an exhortation to set out watchmen to wait for God and the promised redemption. The vision of the redeemed city gives way abruptly to a gory vision of God, spattered in the blood of Israel’s enemies.

Who is this that comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah? 
He that is glorious in his apparel, crouching in the magnitude of his strength. 
I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save. (Isa 63:1) 
I trod them (the nations) in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; 
Their lifeblood is sprinkled upon my garments and I have defiled all my raiment. (Isa 63:3)  

The haftarah ends with a testimony to God’s steadfast love and God’s past acts of redemption. The various units of the pericope are quite distinct and their conjunction within the single lectionary unit is jarring. However, the redaction of the unit unites a powerful assertion of God’s love for Israel with a vivid description of God’s exercise of power in history. The textual conjunction of the two suggests a logical connection as well. This logical connection is articulated in the last verse of the pericope, which is also the last verse of the entire haftarah sequence. “In his love and in his mercy He redeemed them / And lifted them and carried them all the

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96. The repetition of the root כֹּל is particularly significant within the lectionary cycle as a whole. According to the narrative logic of the cycle, the catastrophes of the ninth of Av occurred because Israel rebelled against God and ignored the rebuke of the prophets. In other words, the people denied God’s mastery over them. When, in the final pericope, the prophet proclaims that the land will be called כֹּל, he not only proclaims the erotic reconciliation of God and Israel but also Israel’s renewed submission to divine authority. Cf. Hos 2:16–20, where the trope functions in a similar fashion.

97. In a conversation in August 1998, Tikva Frymer-Kensky suggested that this conjunction of romantic language and military power language resonates with the trope of the bride-price. She drew a comparison between God’s act of vengeance here and David’s bloody acquisition of Philistine foreskins as the bride-price for Michal in 1 Sam 18.

98. Most commentators identify discrete thematic units within Isa 61–63. For example, in his Anchor Bible commentary, John McKenzie divides the pericope into four units: Isa 61, Isa 62, Isa 63:1–6, and Isa 63:7–64:11.
days of old” (Isa 63:9). The sequence ends by asserting that redemption is a function of divine love and divine pity. The love for Israel that God manifests in the present provides the framework for the redemption which he will effect in the future. While this idea is hinted at in Second Isaiah, it is not a dominant theme in the biblical text. The redactors of the cycle raise the trope to a new level of prominence through the strategic selection and arrangement of the lectionary texts. The high concentration of occurrences of the root יְהַוְי and the jarring redaction of the final haftarah underscore the redemptive and consolatory potential of the trope of divine love.

Thus far, I have demonstrated how a literary reading reveals the lectionary cycle’s theology of catastrophe and consolation. However, the lectionary cycle is not only a literary and theological text. It is also a liturgical text. As such, it performs certain functions within the worshiping community.99

Enactment of Divine Reconciliation

As I mentioned above, the lectionary cycle not only argues that God and Israel are reconciled, it also enacts that reconciliation through the consolatory dialogue. While this enactment supports the lectionary’s theological argument, it also serves a liturgical function. Through the recitation of the haftarot, the worshiping community both witnesses and participates in the reconciliation between God and Israel. The community itself, through the proxy voices of the lectionary, is addressed and comforted by God. The reconciliation occurs in their midst. Thus, the lectionary dialogue serves not only as theological argument but also as sacred drama in which the communal feelings of alienation and despair which are articulated on Tisha b’Av are countered and comforted by the consoling God.

From Grief to Consolation

Through the enactment of Zion’s journey from despair to consolation, the lectionary cycle provides an opportunity for the worshiping community to express grief, anger and despair over Israel’s historical situation without becoming mired in a state of grief and alienation. In the liturgical context, the composite voice of Zion and the individuals who advocate for her within the liturgical cycle represent the voice and experience of the worshiping community. In Lamentations, the speaker who witnesses Zion’s

99. It is more precise to say that it can potentially perform certain functions. If no one is listening to the haftarot or if people are listening to the melody but not the words, then any potential effect worked by the literary features of the texts will not be realized. Nevertheless, those potential effects are inscribed within the texts themselves.
devastation stands in the same position as the worshipers who commemorate and mourn the destruction of the city. In the haftarot of consolation, it is Zion herself who grieves over the exile and destruction. As the survivor of the devastation, she speaks for the worshiping community. Finally, in the last haftarah of consolation, it is once again an individual human who speaks. He accepts consolation and agrees to rejoice in God. In the biblical contexts, these voices represent different speakers and different viewpoints; in the lectionary cycle, however, they all cohere in the communal voice—the voice of those who mourn and must cope with the catastrophic events of Israel’s past and present. Over the course of the lectionary cycle, this composite communal voice experiences the grieving process in realistic psychological terms. On Tisha b’Av, when the catastrophes themselves are invoked in graphic and horrific detail, the lectionary text expresses overwhelming grief and despair. Zion is devastated and both she and the speaker who advocates for her can hardly even imagine the possibility of a reconciliation with God. At this moment, the optimism which is briefly expressed in Lam 3 cannot be sustained. It gets drowned out by the overwhelming grief and despair of the rest of the book. In the ensuing weeks, God, through a process of trial and error, articulates a consolation which assuages the anxieties and counters the accusations of Lamentations. From a theological perspective, the articulation of an adequate consolation seems to catalyze the expression of joy in the final haftarah. However, from the perspective of the grief process, it is important to remember that the journey from grief to consolation occupies one-seventh of the liturgical year. The community, like an individual mourner, takes significant time to move from grief and despair to consolation and renewal. The lectionary cycle provides a liturgical experience in which the community mourns intensely, experiences the slow but ultimately successful journey from grief to consolation, and arrives at Rosh Hashanah ready to accept the divine sovereignty which is the central theological trope of the holiday.

Exhortation and Efficacy

As liturgy, the lectionary cycle not only provides a model for expressing and coping with national grief; it also demonstrates a mechanism for persuading God to act on Israel’s behalf. Individual haftarah texts suggest that if Israel bombards God with lamentation, supplication and reminders

100. Malzor Vitry states, “It is the way of comforters to offer consolation little by little. The one who delivers too much consolation to the despairing is like one who says to a beggar, ‘tomorrow you will be king’—he will not be believed.”
of God’s promises, God may be moved to respond. In Isa 62:6–7, the speaker states:

> On the walls of Jerusalem, I have stationed guards;  
> All day and all night they will never be still.  
> You who remind God—do not rest.\textsuperscript{101}  
> And do not give rest to him until he establishes  
> And makes Jerusalem praiseworthy in the land.

Here the speaker suggests that the perpetual pestering of God to fulfill his promises can have an effect on divine behavior. Lamentations 2:18–20 implies a similar argument regarding lament. In 2:18–19, the speaker urges the walls of Zion to cry out and cry ceaselessly. He urges Zion to get up in the night and weep and raise her hands before God in supplication. Finally, in 2:20 the speaker turns his address to God and exhorts: “Look, YHWH, and observe, whom you have caused to suffer so.” The concatenation of verses suggests that the weeping and lamenting of the personified Zion can draw God’s attention to her plight and spur God to act on her behalf.

This belief in the power of exhortation, articulated in the individual haftarot, is relevant to the lectionary cycle as a whole. Through the recitation of the promises of restoration and redemption in the haftarot of consolation, the worshiping community, like the guards of Isa 62:6–7, constantly remind God of his promises. Although it does not state so explicitly, the cycle suggests that the recitation of divine prophecies of restoration might move God to act on those prophecies.

**The Theology of Consolation in the Context of the Synagogue**

Attention to the context of the late antique synagogue further illuminates the relationship between the rabbinic theology of consolation articulated in the lectionary cycle and the non-rabbinic theology that may have been espoused by synagogue communities before the advent of widespread rabbinic influence. In my discussion of the culture of the non-rabbinic synagogues, I noted that the archaeological evidence suggests that the synagogue communities saw their local communities as analogues to the nation of Israel as it is described in the Bible. While this notion seems to be part of the self-understanding of many Jews in late antique Palestine, Seth Schwartz notes that it runs counter to the rabbinic focus on the nation as a

\textsuperscript{101} \textit{ohrāFÞzÌNív} (You who remind) is the hiphil participle form of \textit{rfz}. The form can mean “to remind” or “to mention.” Here, I think both meanings are operative. The watchers invoke both God’s name and God’s deeds, and remind God of his promises and obligations to Israel.
whole.\textsuperscript{102} The performance of the Tisha b’Av sequence in the synagogue testifies to the negotiation of these two ideologies. On the one hand, the language of the lectionary texts is resolutely national. The players in the drama are God and Israel/Zion. However, when this drama is enacted in the synagogue, the local community becomes conflated with the Israel/Zion of the texts. The voice of Zion serves as the spokesperson for the worshiping community and the worshiping community becomes the concrete, ongoing manifestation of Israel/Zion. Thus, the performance of the rabbinic Tisha b’Av lectionary sequence in the synagogue facilitates the coexistence of these two conflicting ideologies of community.

The lectionary cycle also echoes the identification of the synagogue with the temple. This identification, which seems to have been a central part of synagogue culture, was the subject of some ambivalence in the tannaitic literature, and was not fully espoused until the amoraic period, at which time the rabbinic anxiety over this identification seems to dissipate. Amoraic and post-amoraic sources develop more fully the ideas of synagogue sanctity, kinship between the synagogue and the temple, and kinship between synagogue practices and the defunct temple cult.\textsuperscript{103}

The performance of the Tisha b’Av lectionary sequence in the synagogue attests to rabbinic willingness to accept this identification in the fifth to sixth centuries. Tisha b’Av is the day of the most intense and concentrated mourning for the temple in the Jewish calendar. Since the temple was the historic locus for the encounter between God and Israel, this prolonged and intense meditation on its destruction raises the spectre, articulated at the end of Lamentations, of a permanent rupture in the God-Israel relationship. However, in the weeks following Tisha b’Av, the hafta-rot of consolation assert that the relationship between God and Israel continues despite the absence of the temple. The enactment of the dialogue of reconciliation in the synagogue draws an analogy between the synagogue and the absent, lamented, temple. Whereas in biblical times, necessary reconciliations between God and Israel occurred in the temple, now they occur in the synagogue through the enactment of the lectionary dialogue.

Lastly, while it is difficult to articulate the precise significance of the synagogue iconography, the frequency of zodiac and sun-god imagery suggest that God’s role in the cosmic order was a major point of interest or concern for the synagogue-building communities of late antiquity. While

\textsuperscript{102} Schwartz, *Imperialism*, 287.

\textsuperscript{103} For discussions of the growth of the idea of the sacrality of the synagogue in rabbinic literature and growing rabbinic comfort with assertions of relationship between the synagogue and the temple, see Steven Fine, *This Holy Place: On the Sanctity of the Synagogue During the Greco-Roman Period* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 35–94; Schwartz, *Imperialism*, 230–38.
the rabbinic literature—both the professional literature and the liturgy—retains a belief and interest in God’s role in the cosmic order, this interest is subordinate to a concern with Israel’s covenantal history and covenantal relationship with God. In his analysis of several piyyutim, Schwartz has argued that one of the features of the rabbinization of the synagogue was a historicization of the cosmic theology articulated by the synagogue iconography. The Tisha b’Av lectionary sequence reinforces Schwartz’s hypothesis. The rabbinic literature testifies to a wide range of understandings of segments of the season stretching from the seventeenth of Tammuz through Tisha b’Av to Rosh Hashanah. The fast day itself is identified as an unlucky day on which unlucky events occur; the “three weeks” are identified as times of cosmic malevolence. The fifteenth of Av was once a fertility festival, and Rosh Hashanah itself is associated with the judgment of humanity and the birthday of the world. While traces of each of these layers of meaning exist, to greater and lesser extents, throughout the rabbinic literature and liturgy, the lectionary sequence ascribes a covenantal significance to the period. Through the articulation of the sin-punishment-restoration narrative and through the description of the repaired relationship between God and Israel, the lectionary posits a covenantal significance while excluding other possible meanings. Thus, like the piyyut that Schwartz analyzes, the Tisha b’Av lectionary bears witness to rabbinic attempts to assert a covenantal-historical theology as the central framework for the community’s self-understanding.

Conclusion

The preceding analyses reveal the ways in which the literary features of the lectionary cycle communicate a theology of catastrophe and consolation which is different from that expressed by the lectionary texts in their biblical contexts. The patterns of repetition and echo, as well as the larger structures of narrative and dialogue, bring the texts of the lectionary into meaningful relationship with one another. In many cases, these relationships are grounded in pre-existent correspondences among the biblical texts. It is the strategies of selection and arrangement, however, which highlight and signify these correspondences.

The lectionary cycle as a whole asserts that the events of 587 BCE and 70 CE are the catastrophes commemorated on Tisha b’Av. Through the designation of Lamentations as the lectionary text for the fast day, the redactors of the cycle identify the destructions of Jerusalem as heart-rending and devastating events which victimized not only the inhabitants but also the personified city itself. By selecting Lamentations, the redactors also give voice to theological anxieties and concerns which are raised by the events of Tisha b’Av. Lamentations worries that the historical devastation
is a sign of unbounded divine anger. It expresses the concern that the alienation between God and Israel, which was represented by the destructions, will last forever. While the lectionary cycle gives full voice to the despair and anxiety of Lamentations, it also situates the text within a larger sequence which responds to its theological concerns and challenges. The lectionary cycle as a whole asserts that Lamentations and the historical misfortune and divine alienation that it describes are only a single episode in a larger national and theological narrative. According to the lectionary cycle, Israel’s history does not end with devastation but instead it moves from sin through devastating punishment to reconciliation and redemption.

One of the most significant innovations of the lectionary cycle is the separation of redemption from reconciliation. Through the creation of the dialogue of consolation, the redactors of the lectionary assert that while redemption lies in the future, reconciliation and the establishment of an ongoing intimate relationship between God and Israel occur in the present. In addition to these theological assertions, the lectionary accomplishes certain liturgical functions. It provides a structured vehicle for the expression of communal grief and despair and for the movement from grief to consolation and renewal. In addition, it articulates and enacts a strategy for influencing divine action. Persistent lament, supplication, and recitation of divine promises of restoration might move God to act on the community’s behalf. The lectionary cycle also contributes to the ongoing exploration of the rabbinization of the synagogue in late antiquity. The lectionary cycle echoes the concern for the temple which is expressed in the archaeological remains of the late antique Palestinian synagogues and resonates with the understanding, articulated in the synagogue inscriptions, that the worshiping community is a microcosm of Israel itself. At the same time, the lectionary bears witness to the amoraic acceptance of notions of synagogue sanctity and identification of the synagogue with the defunct temple.

The lectionary constellation not only represents a striking appropriation and re-presentation of biblical material; it also serves as a base text for interpretation at successive levels of cultural and literary transmission. The themes which are revealed through a close reading of the lectionary anthology recur throughout the midrashim and piyyutim which interpret the lectionary texts. In the next two chapters, I will show how these two interpretive genres employ particular literary and exegetical strategies to expand, elaborate on, and nuance these themes.*
