The thematics outlined in chapter 2 emerge from a close reading of the lectionary anthology as a whole. It is quite possible that a person who encountered the texts aurally, week-by-week, in their synagogue context would miss many of the nuances and intricacies which are visible only to the close reader. The interpretive texts which comment on the lectionary cycle therefore explicitly identify and further elaborate on the themes of the lectionary texts and the season as a whole.

The chapters regarding the Tisha b’Av cycle in the Pesikta de-Rav Kahana serve as a case in point. These chapters are ostensibly collections of individual exegeses of the opening verses of each haftarah. Through serial exegeses of the opening verses, the chapters of PRK define for the reader/audience the themes which, according to the midrash, are implicit in the biblical verses themselves. As I will demonstrate, the chapters in this midrashic collection identify and underscore the central lectionary themes that I identified in chapter 2.

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The Pesikta de-Rav Kahana is a collection of midrashic materials organized around the lectionary cycle. It is Palestinian in origin and probably dates from the late fifth or early sixth century CE.¹ The collection consists

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¹ In his pioneering work on PRK (Die gottendienstlichen Vorträge der Juden historisch entwickelt [Berlin: Asher, 1832]), Leopold Zunz posited the existence of a collection of midrashim organized around the lectionary calendar called Pesikta de-Rav Kahana, which he dated to circa 700 CE. Zunz’s judgment was based on his assumption that PRK used the Palestinian Talmud, Gen R., Lev R., and Lam R. However, because of the striking stylistic and literary similarities between Lev. R and
of 28 chapters, each of which is an anthology of midrashic material pertaining to the lectionary text for a festival or special sabbath. While there is debate over the original order of the chapters, the oldest available manuscript, the Oxford manuscript (thirteenth century), begins with the chapter relating to Hanukah. The subsequent chapters follow the order of the festal calendar.

- Chapter 1: Hanukah
- Chapters 2–5: four special sabbaths preceding Passover
- Chapters 6–12: Passover, the Omer, Shavuot
- Chapters 13–22: Tisha b’Av season
- Chapters 23–26: Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur
- Chapters 27–28: Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret

The Mandelbaum edition also includes several chapters in the appendices which were found only in certain manuscripts. With the exception of chapters 13–22 (Tisha b’Av season), 24 (the sabbath after Rosh Hashanah) and 25 (Selihot), the chapters all deal with the pentateuchal readings for the designated holy days. Only the chapters regarding the Tisha b’Av season and the sabbath immediately following Rosh Hashanah treat the des-

PRK, contemporary scholars such as Bernard Mandelbaum (Pesikta de Rav Kahana: According to an Oxford Manuscript with Variants, ed. Bernard Mandelbaum [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1987], 2:x), and Lewis Barth (“‘The Three of Rebuke and the Seven of Consolation’: Sermons in the Pesikta de Rav Kahana,” JJS 33 [1982]: 503–15) assign the work to the fifth century. This early date is supported by the suggestion, first made by Zunz, that the liturgical poet Eleazar Kallir (sixth to seventh century) knew of the work.

2. According to Zunz’s reconstruction, PRK began with the chapter on Rosh Hashanah and followed the order of the festal calendar. Thirty-six years later Solomon Buber discovered and collected four manuscripts of PRK and published the first critical edition (Pesikta: ve-hi agadat Erets Yisra’el meyuḥeset le-Rav Kahana [Lyck: Ḥevrat Mekitse Nirdamim, 1868]). Buber’s edition follows the order of the Safed manuscript, which begins with the chapter for Hanukah. Since Buber’s publication, three additional manuscripts and a number of fragments have been discovered. One of these, Oxford, conforms to Zunz’s hypothesis that PRK begins with Rosh Hashanah. While Mandelbaum agrees that this ordering probably reflects the original order, he bases his edition on the Oxford manuscript and consequently begins with the chapter regarding Hanukah.
designated haftarot. The chapter for Selihot is also anomalous; it revolves around a series of texts dealing with repentance and forgiveness.3

Each of the chapters of PRK consists of a series of petiḥot (proems) which end in the opening verse of the designated lectionary texts. The petiḥot are followed by a series of exegetical comments on the first verse or verses of the lectionary text. Each chapter ends with a messianic or eschatological interpretation of the lectionary verse.

Sitz im Leben

For many years, an extensive scholarly conversation took place regarding the Sitz im Leben of the homiletical midrashim in general, and the petiḥta genre in particular. Scholarly consensus in the middle of the twentieth century identified the petiḥot as literary versions of oral sermons that were, if not verbatim transcripts, at least close approximations of the sermons themselves. In recent years, this opinion has given way to the judgment that the petiḥot are literary compositions. While individual exegeses within them may have originated as oral exegeses, the petiḥot themselves are rabbinic literary creations which were authored in the academic setting of the beit midrash and were probably written for other members of the rabbinic elite.4

3. Abraham Goldberg (review of Bernard Mandelbaum, ed., Pesikta de Rav Kahana, Kiryat Sefer 43 [1967]: 77) suggests that this chapter was designated for the fast of Gedaliah and perhaps other fast days as well. He notes that in several of the manuscripts, it is appended to the previous chapter, but he agrees with Mandelbaum’s decision to treat it as a separate unit because it deals with pentateuchal texts, whereas chapter 24 deals with prophetic texts.

While PRK is a product of the beit midrash, it is intimately linked to the public recitation of scripture because it is a collection of exegeses of biblical texts in their role as lectionary texts. Each chapter comments on the opening verses of a lectionary text and the chapters are ordered according to the calendar. In addition, many of the exegeses of lectionary verses in PRK explore themes which may or may not be relevant to the verses in their biblical contexts, but are unquestionably relevant to the festival or season for which they are the designated texts. As I will demonstrate below, many of the exegeses contained in the chapters on the Tisha b’Av haftarot invoke the theologies of sin, punishment, and consolation that are articulated in the lectionary sequence itself. Thus, it is the lectionary—the texts and context of the popular synagogue Bible—which provides the occasion for the rabbinic reflections contained in PRK’s commentaries. While the commentaries in PRK are not synagogue texts like the lectionary sequence or the piyyutim, they are, nevertheless, generated and informed by the popular, lectionary function of the target texts.

The identification of PRK as a text of the academy which comments on the biblical texts in their popular, lectionary context suggests that PRK, along with the other homiletical midrashim, might have functioned as a sort of bridge text. Although he rejects the identification of the petiḥa as a transcript of a live sermon, Richard Sarason has agreed that some of the petiḥot might have originated as sermons; David Stern has recently suggested that the collections of homiletical midrashim might have been rabbinic source books for preachers. While there is currently no definitive evidence regarding the compositional history or use of the homiletical

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5. See pp. 87–107 for a discussion of the combination of local exegetical concerns and larger thematic concerns in the chapters of PRK.

midrashim, the hypotheses of Stern and Sarason reflect the combination of synagogue orientation and academic form that characterizes PRK and the other homiletical midrashim.

**Poetics**

In many ways, the midrashic collection is the ideal case study for exploring the intersection of theology and exegesis that I described in the Introduction. At each level of composition, the midrash manifests both exegetical and thematic concerns. The individual units in the chapters of PRK are ostensibly exegetical units which interpret particular details of a biblical verse. However, in many cases the exegesis of the verse serves as a means to introduce and explore themes which are not present in the plain sense of the verse itself. Thus, each unit is simultaneously an interpretation of a verse and a means by which the midrashist can introduce and explore particular theological ideas. While the individual units articulate a variety of exegetical and thematic concerns, the selection of units and their arrangement within the chapters create coherent thematic units which define and explore the themes of the lectionary season. While not all of the units deal with the themes of the season, I will demonstrate that a critical mass of the units participate in the thematic coherence.

**Individual Units**

The individual exegetical units in PRK serve a dual purpose. They interpret features of a particular biblical verse, and at the same time define for the audience the themes which, according to the midrashist, are relevant to the target verse of the unit. The expansive nature of midrashic exegesis facilitates this dual function. According to the assumptions of midrashic hermeneutics, the Torah is a fundamentally multivalent text. Because each verse of Torah is theoretically endlessly significant, any given verse can become the vehicle for the discussion of a number of themes. For example, in PRK 13, Jer 1:1 becomes the vehicle for the discussion of subjects as diverse as Jeremiah’s lineage (PRK 13:4, 5 and 12) and the permanence of the prophetic word (PRK 13:3). Midrash’s atomistic approach to exegesis also contributes to the multiplication of themes. In midrashic exegesis,

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7. Midrash has been touted as a free and radically multivalent genre in which any given word in Torah can be interpreted endlessly—even to the point of self-contradiction. While this might be true in theory, in practice, midrash is a more bounded genre. Particular biblical verses become prooftexts for a limited number of assertions and reappear in different contexts as proof for these assertions.
verses, phrases, words, and, occasionally, individual letters serve as exegetic subjects. Consequently, the exegesis of a verse often is accomplished through the exegesis of its constituent parts. In PRK 13, for example, units 7 and 8 interpret the word דְּבֵרי (words of) while units 11 and 12 interpret the name יְרֵמִי (Jeremiah). Within these units, the words are considered completely independently of one another. As a result, the midrash identifies the themes of the verse as a whole as the aggregate of the themes of its constituent words.

Finally, the intertextual assumptions of midrashic hermeneutics also lead to the multiplication of thematics. In midrashic exegesis, the interpretation of a verse will often invoke or encompass the exegesis of another biblical verse. The petihta form serves as a case in point. It opens with a biblical verse which seems unrelated to the target verse and then interprets this petihta verse. This interpretation might be simple or complex. It might be an interpretation of the verse as a whole or it might be an atomistic interpretation which breaks the verse down into its constituent parts and interprets each part separately. Ultimately, at the end of the exegesis of the petihta verse, a connection is made to the target verse which, theoretically, illuminates the target verse in a new way for the audience or reader. While the petihta is presented as a commentary on the target verse, the bulk of the unit is an exegesis of the petihta verse. Thus, the meanings generated by the exegesis of a distant verse, which might be completely foreign to the plain sense of the target verse, are imported into a discussion of the target verse.8 As I will discuss in more detail below, the petihta is a particularly powerful exegetical device. Through the strategy of the petihta, a verse such as Jer 1:1, which does not discuss any of the issues raised by the Tisha b’Av season, can be transformed into a vehicle for the exploration of issues such as the theology of sin and punishment and the nature of the prophetic word.

**Chapters**

Joseph Heinemann’s work provides the starting point for the scholarly discussion regarding the coherence of the midrashic chapter. Heinemann asserted that the chapters of Leviticus Rabbah were highly crafted literary compositions. He argued that the fixed structure of the chapters (petihta, gufa [body], messianic peroration) proves that the redactor did not assemble his material randomly. At the very least, he organized his materials according to genre and arranged his composition according to a conventional structure. The question remains, however, as to whether the

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chapters of Leviticus Rabbah manifested signs of further compositional crafting.

Heinemann found that while all of the chapters of Leviticus Rabbah were comprised of individual (according to Heinemann, pre-existent) units, 22 of the 37 chapters were homogenous with regard to theme.\(^9\) Consequently, Heinemann asserted that the redactor strove to create thematically coherent compositions out of pre-existing exegetical traditions culled from both live sermons and academic expositions of scripture. Each individual chapter is shaped by two, occasionally conflicting, motivations; the redactor wanted to explore a particular theme from a variety of angles while preserving the integrity of the pre-existing traditions. The redactors of the midrash chose pre-existent exegetical traditions that focused on a particular theme and wove them together into an integrated composition which explored that theme from different perspectives. Even in those chapters that were heterogeneous with regard to theme, Heinemann saw evidence of a high degree of compositional intentionality. The individual units were redacted in an ordered, structured way which both preserved the integrity of the pre-existent units and created a coherent anthology. Heinemann posits that the juxtaposition of contrasting and often contradictory texts and the multiplication of perspectives on any given topic are devices for integration. Through these strategies, the redactor “integrated” discrete, divergent traditions into a single coherent composition.

While Heinemann’s observation regarding the high degree of thematic homogeneity, or at least of thematic focus, in many of the chapters of Leviticus Rabbah is quite perceptive, his descriptions of the techniques of “integration” are less persuasive. The presence of conflicting texts and entire blocks of pre-existent traditions can be seen as evidence that the redactor was more intent on preserving earlier traditions than on creating a unified composition. Nevertheless, Heinemann’s pioneering work has been quite influential in midrashic scholarship. In recent decades, other scholars have attempted to further nuance his notion of integration by exploring the strategies through which the redactors of the midrash combined and juxtaposed discrete exegetical units.\(^10\)

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In his essay “Midrash and the Language of Exegesis,” David Stern amends Heinemann’s description of thematic coherence:

Instead of viewing that coherence as deriving from unity of theme, however, I wish to suggest that each chapter consists of an extended exegesis of the scriptural verse that serves as its prooftext. This exegesis develops progressively, albeit discontinuously, through the homily, and though it is nowhere stated explicitly in the chapter, it becomes clear to the reader by the homily’s conclusion. The coherence of the homily consequently results from the logic by which the redactor allows the exegesis to unfold before the reader.11

Stern agrees with Heinemann’s assertion that a theme emerges by the end of the chapter. He differs from Heinemann in his description of how that theme is generated. For Stern, midrash in general and the homiletical chapter in particular are primarily exegetical genres:

In midrash the activity of exegesis is more powerful than the statement of theme. To be sure, the balance between the two is delicate . . . But what finally gives the Midrashic text its coherence, or semblance thereof, is not thematic unity but the pursuit of interpretation of the scriptural verse . . .12

For Stern, the petihta provides the model for the coherence of the chapter. Just as the petihta is an exegesis of the petihta verse that arrives at its “destination” in the target verse, so too is the chapter an atomistic interpretation of the target verse that arrives at its destination: the messianic peroration and a subtle articulation of the midrashically derived “message” of the target verse. In his reading of Lev R. 1, Stern demonstrates how the interplay of theme and exegesis works. He asserts that by the end of the chapter, “the language of havivut” (intimate companionship) has emerged as the theme of the chapter. He is careful to note, however, that the development of this theme never fully subverts or overshadows the individual exegetical processes that comprise the chapter.13

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12. Ibid., 112.
13. I agree with Stern’s description of the interplay of exegetical and thematic concerns in the homiletical chapter. However, his reading of Lev R. 1:1 overlooks the explicit thematics of the unit in an attempt to uncover and articulate a deeper thematic unity. It is clear from a close reading of the chapter that the redactor has chosen a cluster of texts that deal with levels of divine speech and encounter and with levels of prophetic experience. Stern overlooks this obvious thematic field in order to assert that the chapter has a deeper thematic focus which is derived subtly through exegesis and never stated explicitly.
Stern’s modification of Heinemann’s theory of thematic unity applies to PRK’s chapters on the haftarot of the Tisha b’Av cycle. While a chapter might articulate a particular thematic field, the individual units of the chapter consist of the atomistic exegeses of either a petihta verse or the lemma. These exegeses each contribute to the articulation of the theme. The larger exegetical projects—namely, the exegesis of the petihta verse or lemma in its entirety—provide the framework for integrating the individual exegetical units and their articulations of theme into a complex, integrated composition. As Stern asserts, the individual units are bound together as elements of a complex exegetical process rather than as elements of logical-thematic exposition. The final result is one in which exegetical and thematic concerns are intertwined and interdependent. PRK 13 and 22 demonstrate this interdependence. In these chapters, the issues raised by the individual exegetical units participate in an overall thematic coherence which addresses the issues raised by the individual texts in their lectionary contexts as well as by the lectionary cycle as a whole.

**Analysis**

In the two case studies which follow, I will show how the individual units serve both as local exegeses and vehicles for the exploration of themes which are absent from the plain sense of the target verse but relevant to either its biblical or lectionary context. I will then demonstrate how the redactors of PRK use the strategies of selection and arrangement to shape each chapter into a coherent thematic unit which focuses on the particular function of the text within the lectionary sequence. Chapter 13, which comments on the opening verses of the first haftarah of rebuke, mirrors the central functions of the first haftarah within the lectionary cycle. It outlines the narrative of sin-punishment-restoration and explores the nature and reliability of the prophetic word. In addition, the chapter offers an ambiguous portrayal of the exilic experience which is entirely absent from the first haftarah of rebuke, but reflected in the lectionary cycle as a whole. The final chapter in the cycle, chapter 22, interprets the opening verses of the final haftarah. This chapter is a thematically coherent unit which, like the final haftarah itself, asserts that God’s love for Israel is redemptive and will inevitably cause God to intervene in history on Israel’s behalf.

**Chapter 13**

Chapter 13 is structured as an interpretation of Jer 1:1, the opening verse of the first haftarah of rebuke. To the casual reader, Jer 1:1 would not seem a terribly fruitful candidate for exegesis. It states, “The words of Jeremiah,
son of Hilkiah of the priests who are in Anatoth in the land of Benjamin.” In its biblical context, the verse is a straightforward identification of the prophecies to follow as the words of Jeremiah. Within the midrashic context the verse is read and interpreted at three levels. Units 7, 8, 12 and 13 deal with the details and peculiarities of the verse itself. Units 7 and 8 interpret the word יָדֶּר (“words of”). While not sui generis, the formulation “The words of X prophet” is rare in the biblical corpus. Only the books of Micah and Jeremiah introduce the prophetic speech as the words of the prophet himself. This irregularity provides the exegetical motor for the exploration of the nature of the prophetic word in the chapter. Units 12 and 13 offer various midrashic etymologies of the name “Jeremiah.” While some of the resulting interpretations dovetail with larger thematic concerns, these units are strongly exegetical. They are launched by features of the lectionary verse itself.

While these units are launched by individual features of the verse, units 4–6 and 12–14 are generated by the subject of the verse as a whole: the prophet Jeremiah. Units 4, 5 and 12 discuss Jeremiah’s descent from Rahab and spin out the moral and theological implications of that descent. Units 6, 13 and 14 assert analogies between Jeremiah and Moses and Benjamin in order to articulate particular features of Jeremiah’s identity and role. While the biblical text does not mention Jeremiah’s descent from Rahab or his similarities to Moses and Benjamin, the midrash uses the introduction of the prophet within the biblical text as a frame for elaborating on his identity and his career. In other words, these midrashic units elaborate on the function of the verse within its biblical context.

A third set of units interprets the verse within the context of the lectionary cycle. Within the cycle, the first haftarah introduces the three haftarot of rebuke as well as the cycle as a whole. As discussed above, the three haftarot of rebuke decry Israel’s sins and bear witness to the sin portion of the sin-punishment-redemption paradigm. These three haftarot provide the “evidence” that the catastrophes lamented on the ninth of Av are just punishment for Israel’s sins, not capricious divine fury. Despite the fact that Jer 1:1 mentions none of these themes, several units of chapter 13 use the verse as a framework for invoking them. Units 2, 4, 5, 8–11 and 13 invoke Israel’s sins. Jeremiah’s prophecy is identified or portrayed as rebuke in units 2, 5–7, 10 and 14. The exile and/or destruction of Jerusalem is invoked or described in units 8–11 and 15. Finally, the sin-punishment paradigm is invoked in units 2, 5, 8, 10 and 11. Thus the chapter sets up the themes and modes of the haftarot of rebuke.

Finally, the over-arching shape of the chapter articulates the narrative of rebuke, punishment and consolation which undergirds the cycle. The strategic selection and placement of units 1, 9, 10 and 15 provide the anchors for this narrative structure. Unit 1 introduces the themes of sin, re-
buke, and punishment. Units 9 and 10 describe the destruction itself. Unit 15 describes the restoration of Jerusalem and the redemption of the exiles.

Unit 1

The opening petihta sets the thematic stage for the Tisha b’Av cycle by situating the opening verse of the first haftarah in a larger context of exile, rebuke and punishment. In so doing, it mirrors the function of the first haftarah within the cycle. Because of its importance to my analysis, I will cite the text in full.

R. Abba bar Kahana opened: Give a shrill cry, O Bat-gallim! Hearken, Laishah! Take up the cry, Anatoth! (Isa 10:30). Give a shrill cry: shout with your voice. O Bat-gallim: Daughter of the waves. Just as the waves are distinguished in the sea, so are your ancestors distinguished in the world.


Hearken! (Isa 10:30): Hearken to my commandments, hearken to words of Torah, hearken to words of prophecy. If not, Laishah: A lion will arise against you—this is the evil Nebuchadnezzar, of whom it is written: The lion has come up from his thicket (Jer 4:7). Take up the cry (והבּגּו): Poor in righteous people, poor in words of Torah, poor in commandments and good deeds. If not, Anatoth: The one from Anatoth will come and prophesy against you words of rebuke. For this reason, scripture had to say The words of Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah, of the priests of Anatoth.

The bulk of the petihta consists of an extended exegesis of Isa 10:30. The midrash breaks the verse into three clauses; it translates the first clause into Aramaic and then offers two readings of “Bat-gallim” which identify Israel as the daughter of distinguished and exiled ancestors. The

14. This petihta is also the first unit of Lam R., a collection of midrashim which is closely linked to both the liturgy and thematics of Tisha b’Av.

15. Versions of this text appear in Lam R. Proem 1 and Yal Isa 416. For a detailed comparison of the versions, see Buber, Pesikta, 110–11.

16. הוללות comes from the root ליל (to roll). However, the text glosses it as though it were derived from the root לה (to exile).

17. אומר means lion. The midrash is reading the place name יהושע (Laishah) as a pun on יושע (lion).

18. The midrash is punning on the word יושע, יי, י. If it is derived from the root י, ע, י, it means “cry out” or “answer.” If it is derived from the root י, ע, י, it means “poor.”
rest of the petihta transforms the last part of the verse from an exhortation of alarm and distress to a statement of the deuteronomic ideology of sin and punishment. The midrashist reads “Hearken, Laishah! Take up the cry, Anatoth” to mean: If Israel does not obey Torah, it will be punished with the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar. If Israel does not cry out, Jeremiah, the prophet from Anatoth, will come with words of chastisement.

This unit demonstrates how the petihta form serves as a strategy for expanding the themes and messages of a given biblical verse. Even though the themes of exile, sin, and punishment are absent from the plain sense of both the petihta verse (Isa 10:30) and the target verse (Jer. 1:1), the petihta format allows the midrashist to import these themes into the framework of the target verse.

First, the midrashist uses the strategy of atomistic reading to locate these themes within Isa 10:30. The re-reading of בָּתָּן (bat-Gallim) as בָּתָּתָל (daughter of exiles), the puns on the words לַשׁוֹן (Laishah/lion) and לַשׁוֹן (cry out/poor), and the transformation of the exhortations “Hearken, Laishah” and “Take up the cry, Anatoth” into the conditional phrases “Hearken . . . If not, a lion” and “Take up the cry . . . If not, Anatoth,” transform the verse of exhortation into a verse of deuteronomic warning.

Then, by linking Isa 10:30 to Jer 1:1, the midrashist imports the themes of exile and deuteronomic warning into the framework of the target verse. By reading “Anatoth” in Isaiah 10:30 as a reference to Jeremiah, who is “from the priests of Anatoth,” the midrash establishes a connection between the two verses. Through this connection, the midrash asserts that the themes that arise in the exegesis of Isa 10:30 are relevant to our understanding of Jer 1:1. Thus, the petihta form gives the midrashist the freedom to import a midrashic reading of a foreign verse into the framework of the lectionary text without violating the exegetical structure which shapes the chapter. Even though the bulk of the petihta is an exegesis of Isa 10:30, the conventions of the petihta form identify this exegesis as part of the exegesis of Jer 1:1. Throughout the chapters on the lectionary cycle, the redactors of PRK capitalize on this form to raise issues that are integral to the Tisha b’Av season, but absent from the target verses.

While the primary thrust of the petihta is the articulation of the sin-punishment paradigm, the text also resonates strongly with the haftarot of consolation. Like the haftarot of consolation, the text also resonates with the various exhortations to cry out in joy at the divine advent which are voiced in the haftarot of consolation (Isa 40:9; 52:7–9; 54:1; 62:11–12). In addition, the direct address to Bat-Gallim resonates with the direct addresses to Jerusalem as a female personification in the haftarot: the word לַשׁוֹן (Cry out/unhappy/impoverished) also occurs in Isa 54:11, the open-
ing verse of the third haftarah of consolation. Within the biblical context of Isa 10:30, these correspondences to scattered Second Isaianic texts are not significant to the meaning of the verse. When the verse opens a collection of exegeses of the haftarot of the lectionary cycle, however, these correspondences are underscored; they become vehicles for the optimism which is essential to the cycle. The very verse which launches the themes of rebuke hints at the texts and moves of consolation that conclude the cycle. At the same time, the correspondences between the biblical context of the petihta verse and the Tisha b’Av cycle inform the petihta with both a deep symmetry and a deep irony. In its biblical context, Isa 10:30 is part of a description of the approach of the Assyrian enemy. As the invader approaches Jerusalem, the settlements along the way are instructed to cry out. However, the invader’s approach halts abruptly in Isa 10:33–34, which announces that God will appear at the last moment to repel and conquer the invader. The happy ending of Isaiah 10 constitutes a strong contrast to the tragic absence of divine salvation in the Tisha b’Av events.

Units 9–11
Units 9–11 deal with the destruction and exile. In units 9–11, the davar aher (another interpretation) strategy is used to suggest two radically different interpretations of the exilic experience. Like the petihta form, the davar aher is a powerful redactional strategy which provides an exegetical framework for the introduction of material into the exegesis of a verse. Specifically, the davar aher allows for the assertion of competing interpretations of a single utterance or historical event. In units 9–11, two exegeses of the name “Jeremiah” yield contrasting interpretations of the exilic experience: In 9–10, the exile is the locus for the simultaneous experience of divine punishment and divine compassion; in 11, the exile is the site of divine absence.

Unit 9 begins by recounting a conversation between God and Jeremiah which is not found in the biblical text:

God said to Jeremiah, “Either you go down with them to Babylon and I will remain here or you remain here and I will go down with them.” Jeremiah replied to God, “Master of the Universe, if I go down what benefit will I be to them? Rather, let their creator go down with them, for he will be of benefit to them.”

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19. The material in units 9 and 10 appears in different orders in Lam R. proem 34 and Yal Jer 327. Parallel sources for individual traditions within the pericopes will be cited in the notes.
In this passage, the midrash introduces a portrait of the exile which is radically different from that of Lamentations, in which the events of 587 BCE were marked by an overwhelming sense of both God’s enmity and God’s absence. Here, the midrash asserts that God accompanied Israel into exile. Thus, although the exile is tragic, it does not signify a separation between God and Israel. Instead, it provides the opportunity for God to manifest great compassion and devotion by accompanying the Judeans into exile.20

The text goes on to give an expanded version of the episode recounted in Jer 39–40. Two questions generate this expansion. In Jer 39:12 Nebuchadnezzar says to his chief guard, Nebuzaradan, “Take him, look after him, and do him no harm, but grant whatever he asks you.” Jeremiah 40:1 states:

The word that came to Jeremiah from YHWH, after Nebuzaradan, the chief of the guards, set him free at Ramah, to which he had taken him, chained in fetters, among those from Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled in Babylon.

These two verses seem to present a contradiction. If Nebuzaradan was told to do Jeremiah no harm, how did the prophet end up in chains? The midrash resolves this contradiction through an expansion of the biblical narrative in which Jeremiah insists on joining in with the shackled prisoners:

Nebuchadnezzar gave Nebuzaradan three orders concerning Jeremiah. Take him, look after him, and do him no harm (Jer 39:12). But when Jeremiah saw a band of young men tied by neck chains one to the other, he went and cast in his lot with theirs. Then again when he saw a band of old men tied together by neck chains, he went and cast in his lot with theirs.21

Although Nebuzaradan was ordered not to harm Jeremiah (39:12), Jeremiah insisted on being shackled with the other prisoners. That is how he ended up in fetters in Jer 40:1.

Jeremiah 40 raises another question for the midrash. In vv. 4–5 Jeremiah refuses Nebuzaradan’s offer to go free and to go wherever he pleases in the land. However, v. 6 states that Jeremiah went to Gedaliah at Mizpah. The conjunction of these two verses raises the question: “Why did Jeremiah change his mind?”

20. The notion that God accompanies Israel both to Egypt and into exile appears in several places in the rabbinic literature (e.g., Exod R. 15:17; Num R. 7:10; j. Taan 1:1, 64a; j. Suk 4:1, 54c; b. Meg 29a). The idea is associated exegetically with Jer 40:1 here and in the parallels in Lam R. proem 34 and Yal Jer 327.
21. Lam R. proem 34; Yal Jer 327; Pes R. 29.
But he [Jeremiah] still did not turn back (Jer 40:5) until God revealed himself to him. Thus it is written: The word that came to Jeremiah from YHWH, after Nebuzaradan, the chief of the guards, set him free . . . and he was chained in fetters (Jer 40:1). What is and he? R. Aha said, as if it were possible to say: He and he.

The midrash reads “and he” as a reference to God—meaning that in addition to Jeremiah, God was bound in shackles with the exiles. This is a further radicalization of the trope of divine compassion and identification articulated above. God not only accompanies the Judeans into exiles, he even submits himself to their enchainment. The text then continues:

What was the word [that came to Jeremiah]? . . . R. Lazar said: He who scattered Israel will gather them and guard them as a shepherd his flock (Jer 31:10). R. Yohanan said: For the Lord will ransom Jacob, redeem him from one too strong for him (Jer 31:11).

Once Jeremiah sees that God is committed to “shepherding” Israel and to redeeming them from their oppressors, he is willing to leave the exiles and return to Judea. Unit 9 ends with a poignant description of Jeremiah’s return to Judea:

[Having been released by Nebuzaradan] and on his way back [to Jerusalem], Jeremiah saw fingers and toes [of captive Israel] that had been cut off and flung on the roadways. He picked them up, clasped them close, kissed them, and put them in his cloak, saying to them, “O my children, did I not say to you, Give glory to the Lord your God, before it grows dark, and before your feet stumble, etc. (Jer 13:16)—before words of Torah grow dark for you, before words of prophecy grow dark.23

22. Lam R. proem 34; Yal Jer 327. The version of this story which appears in Lam R. proem 34 is presented within the frame of a commentary on Jer 9:9. In this version, the narrative begins with the conversation between Nebuchadnezzar and Nebuzaradan regarding Jeremiah. The conversation between God and Jeremiah is inserted into the biblical narrative between Nebuzaradan’s offer of freedom in 40:4 and Jeremiah’s refusal in 40:5. The placement of the invented conversation between God and Jeremiah in Lam R. makes better narrative sense because it explains why Jeremiah changes his mind and goes to join Gedaliah. Perhaps it appears at the beginning of the PRK version so that it can serve as an immediate gloss on the name Jeremiah, reading it as רְוֵה (‘God arose’), meaning that God got up and left Jerusalem with the exiles. In Yal Jer 327, the conversation between God and Jeremiah appears after the interpretation of Jer 9:9 which occurs in PRK 13:10.

23. See the sources in n. 22.
The next unit begins with the citation of Jer 9:9. This verse provides the springboard for the articulation of various traditions about the supernatural affects of the exile:

For the mountains I will lift up weeping and wailing and for the pastures in the wilderness, a lament (Jer 9:9). For the tall and lofty mountains that were made into a wilderness, I will raise a lament. They are laid waste, no man passes through, and no sound of cattle (עדרות) is heard (ibid.). It was not enough for you that you did not listen to his voice, rather, נכם: You make me jealous with your idolatry. In spite of this, birds of the sky and beasts as well have fled and are gone (ibid.). For as R. Jose bar Halafta said: For fifty-two years [after the temple’s destruction], not a bird was seen flying over the land of Israel, thus fulfilling the prophecy: Both the fowl of the heavens and the beast are fled and gone. Nevertheless, said R. Hanina: [God saw to it that] forty years before Israel were exiled into Babylon, palm trees were planted in Babylon, because Israel craves sweet kinds of fruit which accustom the tongue to the sweetness of Torah. As taught in the name of R. Judah: [Not only did the bird and the beasts flee, but] for seven years in the land there was fulfilled the prophecy, The whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and a burning (Deut 29:22).

This account of the exile reflects the same ambiguity as the midrashic narrative which precedes it. The exile is simultaneously a catastrophic devastation—the land itself burned for seven years—and an opportunity for God to manifest his sweet devotion to Israel. Even though they were to be punished with exile, God made sure that they would have dates to eat in Babylon. This ambiguity recurs in the rest of the pericope. Even the seven-year conflagration could not squelch the tenacious fertility of the land of Israel. “R. Ze’era said: Come and see how brazen [in plenty] is the land of Israel! [Even as it burned] it produced fruits.” The pericope ends with the assertion that

There are seven hundred species of kosher fish, eight hundred kinds of kosher grasshoppers, and countless birds; they all went into exile with
the children of Israel to Babylon, and when the children of Israel came back, all returned with them except for the fish known as sibutta.\textsuperscript{30}

Although God is not mentioned as the agent here, one can assume that he engineers the exile of the kosher animals. Once again, God is creatively attentive to the needs of the exiled Judeans.\textsuperscript{31}

While units 9 and 10 portray the exile as a time of devastation and dislocation as well as divine attention and presence, unit 11 portrays the exile as a time of divine absence. The text is framed as a \textit{davar aher}: “Another interpretation: Jeremiah: God ascended.”\textsuperscript{32} This interpretation introduces a stylized account of the retreat of the shekhinah from the temple.\textsuperscript{33} The text recounts its stages of retreat and offers prooftexts for each stage. The litany is interrupted by a parable which compares the retreating shekhinah to a king who, when leaving his palace, kisses and embraces the pillars and walls and wishes peace on his house. The shekhinah’s itinerary is interrupted again at the final stage:

There, on the Mount of Olives, for three and a half years—so said R. Jonathan—the shekhinah lingered, crying three times a day, Return, you backsliding children, I will heal your backslidings (Jer 3:22). But when they did not repent, the shekhinah soared up into the atmosphere and spoke this verse: I will go and return to My place, until they acknowledge their guilt, and seek My face; in their trouble they will seek Me earnestly (Hos 5:15).

Within the chapter, this unit serves as a companion piece to the unit which precedes it. Both readings are generated by the name, “Jeremiah,” and both assert that God leaves Jerusalem at the destruction. However, here God’s departure is a retreat from Israel, not an act of solidarity. God will return to the supernal abode until Israel repents. Through the strategy of the \textit{davar aher}, the name “Jeremiah” comes to describe two radically different possibilities of divine behavior. These possibilities in turn suggest two radically different interpretations of the exilic experience. In the first, the

\textsuperscript{30} Lam R. proem 34; j. Taan 4:8, 69b; Yal Jer 281.

\textsuperscript{31} These two final traditions not only assert the tenacity of the land and God’s providential care for Israel in exile, they also insist that, despite the exile, both the people and land of Israel survived with their national and geographic identities intact. Despite devastation, the land of Israel retains its edenic fertility and, despite exile, the Jews retain their Jewish identity, manifest through their observance of the dietary laws.

\textsuperscript{32} This interpretation is based on a parsing of וביתו (Jeremiah) as ובתי ("God arose").

\textsuperscript{33} The account of the shekhinah’s retreat from the temple appears in Lam R. proem 25; Yal Jer 257; Yal Ezek 350; ARN 34 (version A); MHG \textit{Tazria} 13:59; b. RH 31a.
exile is the locus for the simultaneous experience of divine punishment and divine compassion. In the second, the exile is the site of divine absence.

The particular force of the davar aher is made apparent when units 9–11 are compared to the lectionary sequence. Like the midrashic units, the lectionary presents a double-edged vision of the exilic experience. Lamentations asserts that the exile is a sign of enmity and divine alienation; the consolatory dialogue during the seven weeks of consolation asserts that the exilic present of the worshiping community is a time of divine presence and attention. Similarly, the midrash asserts that God is both absent (unit 11) and present and attentive (unit 9–10) during the exile. Whereas the lectionary cycle presents these interpretations sequentially, the davar aher strategy presents them as simultaneous and equally valid interpretations of the exilic experience.

Unit 15
Chapters in the homiletical midrashim conventionally end with a “messianic peroration,” a final unit which deals with the messianic future. In some chapters, the messianic peroration is closely linked to the themes and tropes of the other units; in others, it seems to be a formal addendum to the chapter. In chapter 13, the messianic peroration concludes the narrative of sin-punishment-redemption articulated by the chapter and serves as a summary unit to the chapter as a whole:

To whom the word of God came in the days of Josiah, king of Judah until the end of the tenth year of Zedekiah, son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month (This is a paraphrase of Jer 1:2–3).
R. Abun said: A lion arose in the astrological sign of the lion and destroyed Ariel. A lion arose: This is Nebuchadnezzar the wicked. It is written about him: A lion arose from his thicket (Jer 4:7). In the astrological sign of the lion: Until the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month (Jer 1:3). And destroyed Ariel: Ah Ariel, Ariel the city where David camped (Isa 29:1). On that account a lion will arise in the astrological sign of the lion and will rebuild Ariel. A lion will come: This is God. It is written about him: A lion roars, who will not fear (Amos 3:8). In the sign of the lion: I will turn your mourning into joy (Jer 31:13). And will rebuild Ariel: God builds Jerusalem; He gathers in the exiles of Jerusalem (Ps 147:2).

35 This interpretation hinges on the two meanings of the word “Ariel” (אריאל), which means “lion of God” and is also an epithet for Jerusalem.
The unit conforms to the conventions of the messianic peroration by foretelling the restoration of Jerusalem and the return of the exiles. This prediction of restoration also completes the narrative begun in the first unit and continued in units 9–11. Here, at the end of the chapter, the account of sin, rebuke and punishment culminates in redemption. The unit also serves as an *inclusio* to the chapter as a whole. In the first *petihta*, Nebuchadnezzar is referred to as a lion and his attack on Jerusalem is forecast. Here in the final unit he is once again referred to as a lion, but this time his moment of conquest is in the past and the text looks forward to its reversal. The correspondence between the first and last units supports the argument for the coherence of the chapter. The catastrophe is foretold in particular terms in the first unit and is reversed in identical terms in the final unit.

Unit 15 also resonates strongly with the lectionary cycle as a whole. On the level of plot, this text tells the same story as the cycle. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple; God will rebuild it. Like the lectionary cycle, this text pictures a symmetry between the destruction and the restoration. In the cycle, the haftarot of consolation articulate precise reversals of the woes lamented in Lamentations. Here too, the restoration precisely reverses the catastrophe. Just as the destruction was wrought by a “lion” during the sign of Leo, so will the restoration be wrought by a “lion” during the sign of Leo.

**Summary**

In PRK chapter 13, various midrashic structures and strategies are employed to articulate and develop the themes which are familiar from the lectionary cycle. In unit 1, the *petihta* structure provides the vehicle for the introduction of ideas of sin and rebuke into the rather innocuous framework of Jer 1:1. In units 9–11, the *davar aher* strategy transforms the name “Jeremiah” into a framework for the simultaneous assertion of two radically different interpretations of the exile. In unit 15, the messianic peroration provides the framework for introducing the future restoration of Jerusalem and the return of the exiles. While each of these units explores a particular theme of the Tisha b’Av lectionary and season, the arrangement of the pericopes within the chapter articulates the narrative of sin-rebuke-punishment-redemption.

**Chapter 22**

Like chapter 13, PRK chapter 22 articulates the themes and mirrors the function of the haftarah on which it comments. In many ways, the final haftarah serves as a summary to the haftarot of consolation. It invokes
many of the tropes of consolation which appear in the previous haftarot and reiterates the dynamic relationship between the two discourses of consolation which recur throughout the cycle. The disjunctive redaction of the haftarah highlights the differences between the consolation rooted in God’s intimate relationship with Israel and the consolation rooted in God’s powerful and often violent acts of intervention in history. At the same time, the redaction of the haftarah suggests that there is an intimate relationship between the two consolatory discourses. God’s devotion to Israel motivates his redemptive acts on her behalf. In addition, the final haftarah underscores a consolatory strategy which was articulated earlier in the cycle in Lam 3. This strategy, which is also familiar from Psalms, suggests that human lament and prayer has power to move God to attention and intervention.

Chapter 22 articulates and underscores each of these themes. It asserts that God’s romantic love for Israel is the fact that ultimately consoles her and causes her to rejoice. It also asserts, in terms far stronger than those of the haftarah, that God’s love for Israel is inextricably entwined with Israel’s redemption. God’s love has motivated his redemptive acts in the past and will necessarily motivate his redemptive acts in the future. Finally, the midrash asserts that Israel’s persistent faithfulness and romantic devotion to God will move him to intervene miraculously and redemptively on her behalf.

The chapter consists of two petihtot followed by four exegetical units which interpret segments of Isa 61:10–11. It ends with a messianic exegesis of Isa 61:11. With the exception of the messianic conclusion, each of the units deals with themes of romantic love, marriage, barrenness, and fertility.

Unit 1

1. Scripture says elsewhere: *Will you not revive us again so that your people will rejoice in you?* (Ps 85:7). R. Aha said: Your people and your city will rejoice in you.

2. *And Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter; [all who hear will laugh with me]”* (Gen 21:6). R. Yudan, R. Simon, R. Hanin, R. Shmuel b. Isaac (said): If Reuben is happy, why should Simeon care? For here Sarah our mother says, “All who hear will laugh with me.” Rather, the verse teaches that when Sarah our mother gave birth to Isaac, all the barren women conceived, all the deaf gained hearing, all the blind gained sight, all the mute gained speech, and all the mentally incompetent became sound; and everyone said, “if only Sarah would conceive (נפער) again so that we might be attended to (נפגש) with her.”

3. R. Berechiah in the name of R. Levi: [Isaac was born] to add to the heavenly lights. For here it speaks of doing (עשיה): *And God did (עשיה) to
Sarah as he had spoken (Gen 21:1). And it says there: And God made (วาด) the two heavenly lights (Gen 1:16). Just as the “doing” there gives light to the world, so too the “doing” which is spoken of here gives light to the world.

4. It is said here “he did” (วาด) and it says elsewhere “And he made (วาด) a dispensation for the countries.” Just as there “he did” means to give a gift to the world, so here “doing” means to give a gift to the world.

5. R. Berechiah in the name of R. Levi: You find that when our mother Sarah gave birth to Isaac, the nations were saying—God forbid to even think it!—“Sarah did not give birth to Isaac. Rather, Hagar, Sarah’s maid, is the one who gave birth to him.” What did God do? He dried up the breasts of the women of the nations of the world and their noblewomen came and kissed the dust of Sarah’s feet and said to her, “Do us a good deed and suckle our children.” So Abraham said to Sarah, “Sarah, this is no time to be modest. Sanctify the name of God and sit in the marketplace and suckle their children.” Thus it is written: Sarah suckled children (Gen 21:7). “Child” is not written here, rather “children.” And are not these things a case of a conclusion a minori ad majus (רneau קא) ? Just as when a human being receives joy, he becomes happy and makes everyone happy, so when God makes Jerusalem happy [this will happen] all the more so. I will greatly rejoice in YHWH (Isa 61:10).36

PRK 22:1 is a complex composite pericope. Unit 1.1 consists of a brief comment in which Ps 85:7 is used to explain the double locution ¥h¥Ýtò ¥O¥ (“I will greatly rejoice”) in Isa 61:10. The unstated question of the midrash is, “Who are the two subjects indicated by the doubling of the verb ¥O¥?”37 The midrash seems to assume that the obvious rejoicer in Isa 61:10 is Jerusalem. Psalm 85:7, which speaks of the rejoicing of “your people,” pro-

36. The narrative expansion of the birth of Isaac appears in five other sources without any reference to Isa 61:10. In Gen R. 53:8–9 and Yal Vayera 93, the material is introduced in the context of the interpretation of Gen 21:7. In PRE 51, the unit is included within a list of seven divine miracles. In Pes R., the material is divided between two chapters. The material about the miraculous healings which accompanied Isaac’s birth and the gift/light material appear in chapter 42, which interprets Gen 21ff. The material about the gentile women’s mockery and the nursing of their children occurs in chapter 43, which interprets 1 Sam 2:22ff. In MHG Vayera 21:8, the pericope ends with the same kal va homer that appears in PRK, but the Isaiah verse is not invoked. In b. BM 87a the material appears in an aggadic section regarding the manners of the patriarchs. These parallels suggest that the attachment of the Sarah material to the Isaiah verse is a secondary development. The material itself is generated internally by the Genesis pericope.

37. The midrashic question is contrived. The double locution ¥O¥ ¥O¥ represents a case of the infinitive absolute followed by the kal imperfect. It is a common grammatical construction which serves to strengthen the verb.
vides the identity of the second speaker. Thus, the midrash concludes that
the doubled verb refers to the rejoicing of both Jerusalem and the people.

Units 1.2 and 1.3 transmit traditions related to Isaac’s birth. Unit 1.2
opens with a quotation of Gen 21:6: “God has brought me laughter; all
who hear will laugh with me.” The midrash addresses the question, “Why
does Sarah’s laughter make other people laugh?” by relating an extra-bib-
lical tradition which states that when Sarah gave birth, people suffering
from various handicaps were miraculously cured. This miracle explains
why Sarah’s joy caused others to rejoice.

Units 1.3 and 1.4 use the device of the *gezerah shavah* (analogy based
on verbal correspondences) to identify Isaac as both a light and a gift to
the world.38

Unit 1.5 explains an irregularity in Gen 21:7. The verse states: “Who
would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children?” Why
does the verse say “children” when Sarah only bore one child? The mid-
rash resolves this problem by relating another miracle related to Isaac’s
birth. When Sarah gave birth, the nations of the world did not believe that
the baby was hers and claimed that he was Hagar’s son. As punishment
for their disbelief, God dried up the breasts of the foreign women, who
were then forced to beg Sarah to nurse their children. This tradition ex-
plains why Gen 21:7 says that Sarah nursed *children* rather than a *child*.

The section ends by connecting the traditions about the birth of Isaac
to the target verse (Isa 61:10) through a *kal va§omer* construction. The situa-
tion of Isaac’s birth, in which God caused Sarah to rejoice and her joy
caused others to rejoice, is both paralleled and amplified when God brings
joy to Jerusalem. The midrash connects the target verse to the preceding
unit by re-reading the double locution שֶׁנְּחַלְתִּי שֵׁשׁ as an intransitive form
followed by a transitive form: “I will rejoice, and I will make others re-
joice.”39

This unit demonstrates once again the power of the *petihta* form.
There is no organic connection between the bulk of the *petihta* and Isa
61:10.40 PRK 22:1 is comprised of a series of traditions about the birth of

38. These traditions occur together in Gen R. 53:8, Pes R. 42, and Yal Vayera 93.
The “gift” tradition does not appear in Pes R.

39. This reading of שֶׁנְּחַלְתִּי שֵׁשׁ is also contrived. While שֶׁנְּחַלְתִּי can be read as a
*hiphil* form, שֵׁשׁ can only be read as an infinite absolute. It cannot be read as a first
person *kal* form.

40. The parallel sources support this assertion. The traditions regarding Isaac’s
miraculous birth appear five other times in the rabbinic corpus with no mention of
Isa 61:10. In addition, the other midrashic references to Isa 61:10 which comment
on the significance of the double locution do not mention Gen 21:7 (e.g. Lev R. 10:2;
Deut R. 2:37; Song R. 1:1, 2; PRK 16:4; Pes R. 37). Finally, in Yal Isa 505, the Sarah
Isaac which are generated exegetically within the midrashic context by the irregularities in Gen 21:6–7 and by the use of the word-hash (do/make) in v. 6. Within the midrash, Isaac’s birth is a case of miraculous fertility which catalyzes a scene of miraculous physical healing and restoration and a scene in which the foreign nations pay obeisance to Israel. These traditions are not intrinsically connected to Isa 61:10; they are connected only by the kal va-omer construction. Nevertheless, the conventions of the petihta form allow the midrashist to introduce the themes of the unit into the framework of the target verse. In so doing, the midrashist expands the message of Isa 61:10 to include central themes of the lectionary cycle. Like the final haftarah, this petihta invokes the cycle’s central images of restoration: miraculous fertility (cf. Isa 49:21; 54:1; 62:4), physical restoration (cf. Isa 52:1–2), and the obeisance of the nations (cf. Isa 49:23; 55:5; 60:5–16). Within the midrash, these are elements of Isaac’s miraculous birth and, by extension, of the future redemption which it parallels. The midrash also creates a hierarchy among the tropes of consolation and restoration. In PRK’s version of Isaac’s birth, Sarah’s miraculous fertility generates the other miracles. If Isaac’s birth is a paradigm for the redemption, then there too the tropes of renewed fertility, which arise from the discourse of the intimate relationship between God and Israel, assume center stage.

**Unit 2**

The second unit of the chapter is also a complex petihta. This unit introduces the theme of romantic love and its redemptive power. While the bulk of the unit deals with human love, the midrash draws an analogy between this human love and the love between God and Israel which it sees expressed in Isa 61:10:

1. *This is the day that YHWH has made; rejoice and be glad in it* (יהב) (Ps 118:24).
   R. Abun said: We do not know in what we are to rejoice—in the day or in the Holy One Blessed be He. So Solomon came and interpreted it: *We will rejoice and be glad in you* (יהב) (Song 1:4): in you and in your Torah, in you and in your salvation. R. Isaac said יהב, in the 22 letters that you wrote for us in the Torah. Bet equals two and kaf equals twenty.

2. As it is taught: If a man marries a woman and he is with her ten years and she does not bear children, he is not permitted to forsake the commandment “Be fruitful and multiply.” When he divorces her, she is permitted to marry another man. The second one is permitted to stay with...
her ten years (without her bearing children). If she miscarries, they count from the time of the miscarriage. The man is obligated to fulfill the commandment, “Be fruitful and multiply,” but not the woman. R. Yohanan ben Barukah said: He said about both of them: And God blessed them, say-ing, “Be fruitful and multiply…” (Gen 1:28).

3. An incident occurred in Sidon to a man who had married a woman and stayed with her ten years but she did not bear a child. They went before R. Shimon ben Yohai for a divorce. He [the husband] said to her [the wife]: “Every pleasurable thing that I have in my house, take it and go to your father’s house.” R. Shimon ben Yohai said to them, “Just as you were united amid food and drink, so you can only separate amid food and drink.” What did she do? She made a great feast and she made him drink too much. She whispered to her maidservants and said to them, “Take him to my father’s house.” In the middle of the night, he awoke from his sleep; he asked them, “Where am I?” She said to him, “Didn’t you say to me, ‘Every precious thing that I have in my house, take it to your father’s house?’ Isn’t it the case, that I have nothing more precious than you?” When R. Shimon ben Yohai heard this, he prayed for them and they were attended to (conceived). God attends to barren women and the righteous ones attend to barren women. The situation is kal va-homer. When a human being is happy, he causes others to rejoice; when God causes Jerusalem to rejoice, all the more so. And Israel who awaits God’s salvation, all the more so. I will greatly rejoice in my God (Isa 61:10).

The unit is comprised of three independent traditions. The opening unit is a comment on Ps 118:24 which seeks to identify the referent of the word יָאָה in the verse. The midrash brings Song 1:4 as an intertext and, through it, identifies the referents of יָאָה as God, God’s Torah and God’s salvation. Within the context of the petihta, this unit serves as a bridge from the petihta verse to Song 1:4, which serves as the rationale for the inclusion of the next two units.

Unit 2.2 is a legal principle first recorded in m. Yeb 6:6, which states that a man must divorce his wife if she has not borne him children within ten years of their marriage. This legal dictum is followed by the story about the barren couple who go before R. Shimon b. Yohai for a divorce. The story poignantly describes the mutual love of the man and the woman, and, particularly, the tenacity of the woman’s affection. As a reward for her loyalty, R. Shimon b. Yohai prays for them and, through the agency of his prayer, they conceive. The body of the petihta is connected to

42. The legal material appears in a variety of both halakhic and aggadic contexts (Gen R. 45:3; Song R. 1:4; Yal Lekh lekha 79; MHG Lekh lekha 16:3; m. Yeb 6:6, and t. Yeb 8:4).
the target verse through the stereotyped *kal vaḥomer* which is copied from the first unit.\(^{43}\)

This *petiḥta*, like the one before it, serves as a vehicle for importing themes which are foreign to the lectionary verse into the framework of that verse. The opening move of the *petiḥta* introduces Song 1:4. By introducing this verse as an intertext to Isa 61:10, the midrash associates the joy which is expressed in Isa 61:10 with the romantic love expressed in Song of Songs. It also provides a bridge between Isa 61:10 and the narrative of the barren couple. Once Isa 61:10 is linked to Song 1:4, then this narrative, which is part of a tradition of exegesis of Song 1:4, can also be read as applying to Isa 61:10. By importing the narrative into the exegesis of Isa 61:10, the midrash boldly suggests that the relationship between the husband and wife in the midrash can shed light on the relationship between God and Israel. In the narrative, the woman’s tenacious love for her husband saves their marriage and leads to an end to her barrenness. If this relationship is an analogy to the relationship between God and Israel, then the story suggests that Israel’s tenacious love for God can preserve their relationship and lead to the renewal of fertility which has been asserted as a central trope of redemption. This pericope, then, further develops the theme of miraculous fertility which was introduced in the first *petiḥta* by asserting that it is the consequence of deep and tenacious love. Through the strategy of the *petiḥta*, the midrashists have imported the themes of

\(^{43}\) The narrative appears only in Song R. 1:4, MHG *Lekh lekha* 16:3, and Yal *Bereishit* 16. In Yal *Bereishit* 16 it appears in the context of Gen 1:28. In MHG, it appears in the context of a commentary on Gen 16:3, which states, “So Sarai, Abram’s wife, took her maid Hagar the Egyptian—after Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan ten years—and gave her to her husband Abram as a concubine.” This incident is used as support for the legal principle. The MHG version ends with the penultimate line of the PRK version, which states that both God and righteous people can cause barren women to conceive. Within the context of Gen 16, the narrative may function as a critique of Abraham and Sarah. Unlike the biblical couple, the couple in the midrashic narrative is able to solve the barrenness problem through the woman’s love and the consequent intervention of R. Shimon b. Yohai. Abraham and Sarah willingly accede to the law and their acquiescence causes much future strife. In Song R., the narrative appears in the context of the exegesis of the verse, “We will rejoice and be glad in you” (Song 1:4). The logic of the *kal vaḥomer* is stronger in the version of this tradition which appears in Song R. than in PRK:

Behold, it is a case of *kal vaḥomer*. When a human being says to one who is human like him, “I have no precious possession in this world apart from you,” he is paid attention to. When Israel, who is awaiting salvation from God every day, says “We have no precious possession in this world apart from you,” [they will be attended to] all the more so. Thus: *We will rejoice and be glad in you* (Song 1:4).
miraculous fertility and redemptive love into a verse whose plain sense merely asserts that the speaker rejoices in God.

Unit 3

The third unit begins the running exegesis of Isa 61:10:

[This can be compared] to a noblewoman whose husband, son and son-in-law went on a journey to the nations of the sea. They said to her, “Your sons are coming.” She said to them, “Let my daughters-in-law rejoice!” They said to her, “Your sons-in-law are coming.” She said, “Let my daughters rejoice!” When they said to her, “Behold, your husband!” she said, “Joy, this is perfect joy.” Thus, the prophets say to Jerusalem, Our sons will come from afar (Isa 60:4) and she says to them, Let Mount Zion rejoice (Ps 48:12). They will bear your daughters on their sides (Isa 60:4) and she says to them, Let the daughters of Judah rejoice (Ps 48:12). When they say to her, Behold! Your king will come to you! (Zech 9:9), she says to them, I will greatly rejoice in YHWH (Isa 61:10).44

This pericope explicitly asserts that Zion rejoices because God is coming. Furthermore, the force of the parable asserts that Zion’s joy is so great because God, in his role as husband, is returning to her. It is the restoration of the intimate, erotic relationship between God and Israel that gives Zion joy. This assertion resonates strongly within the lectionary cycle. In both the midrashic pericope and the haftarot of consolation, the renewal of divine espousal is identified as the most effective consolation.

Unit 4

This unit, which interprets the phrase, “For he has dressed me in garments of salvation, he has wrapped me in a cloak of righteousness” (Isa 61:10), compares the situation of Israel to that of an orphan.45 The unit identifies the garments of salvation and the cloak of righteousness as the merit which Israel has inherited from her ancestors. This is the only unit in the chapter which does not relate directly to the theme of romantic love.

44. This tradition also appears in Song R. 1:4, where it follows a parallel to the preceding unit in PRK and ends with a reference to Isa 61:10. The occurrence of these two units together in Song R. suggests that Isa 61:10 and the tradition regarding the barren couple become linked through their shared exegetical connection to Song 1:4. The tradition also appears in Deut R. 2:37 and Yal Isa 505 in the context of the exegesis of Isa 61:10.

45. The only parallel appears in Yal Isa 505, also in the context of an exegesis of Isa 61:10.
Unit 5

The final pericope of chapter 22 explicitly states that God’s love for Israel is salvific and will inevitably lead to Israel’s redemption.46

In ten places Israel is called “bride”: six times by Solomon, three times by Isaiah and once by Jeremiah. Six times by Solomon: *Come with me from Lebanon, my bride* (Song 4:8); *You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride* (Song 4:9); *How sweet is your love, my sister, my bride* (Song 4:10); *Your lips drip nectar, my bride* (Song 4:11); *A garden locked is my sister, my bride* (Song 4:12); *I come to my garden, my sister, my bride* (Song 5:1). Three times by Isaiah: *You shall put them all on as an ornament; you shall bind them on as a bride does* (Isa 49:18); and this one, *As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels* (Isa 61:10); and *As a bridegroom rejoices over the bride* (Isa 62:5). And once by Jeremiah: *The voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride* (Jer 33:11). And in correspondence to these, the Holy One Blessed be He donned ten garments. On the day of the creation of the world, the first garment that the Holy One Blessed be He donned was of glory and majesty. As it is written: *You are clothed in glory and majesty* (Ps 104:1). The second garment, which the Holy One Blessed be He wore to destroy the generation of the flood, was of majesty. As it is written: *YHWH reigns; he is robed in majesty* (Ps 93:1). The third garment, which the Holy One Blessed be He wore to give Torah to Israel, was strength. As it is written: *YHWH is robed, he is girded with strength* (ibid.). The fourth garment, which the Holy One Blessed be He wore to destroy the kingdom of Babylon, was white. As it is written: *His raiment was white as snow* (Dan 7:9). The fifth garment, which the Holy One Blessed be He wore to destroy the kingdom of Media, was vengeance. As it is written: *He put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as a mantle* (Isa 59:17)—this [verse counts as] two. The seventh garment, which the Holy One Blessed be He wore to destroy the kingdom of Greece, was righteousness. As it is written: *He put on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation upon his head* (ibid.)—this [verse also counts as] two. The ninth garment, which the Holy One Blessed be He will wear in the future to destroy the kingdom of Edom, is red: *Why is your apparel red* (דנה)? (Isa 63:2)47 The tenth garment, which the Holy One Blessed be He will wear in the future when he destroys the kingdoms of Gog and Magog, will be glory. As it is written:

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46. This pericope is a combination of two separate traditions. The first part of the unit, which identifies the “bride” texts, appears in Deut R. 2:37 and Yal Isa 506 as comments on Isa 61:10. In addition, it appears in Song R. 4:10 and Yal Song 988 as comments on Song 4:10 (“How lovely are your breasts, my sister, bride”). The “garments” section appears in these texts as well as in four additional texts in the context of commentaries on Ps 93:1 (Pes R. 38; Midr Pss 93:1; Yal Pss 847; and MHG Bereishit 1:30).

47. This reading is based on a pun between Edom (אדום) and red (אדום).
This author asserts that there is a correspondence between the ten places that Israel is called “bride” and the ten places that God gets dressed. Although this announcement is made with little fanfare, it is a bold move. There is no contextual relationship between the “bride” texts and the “dressing” texts. The texts themselves do not assert that God gets dressed when Israel is called bride or that God gets dressed because Israel is called bride. The argument for thematic correspondence is based only on the parallel number of occurrences. The second innovation is the identification of each act of dressing with a particular moment of divine intervention in history. In three out of the six cases this identification is motivated by the prooftexts themselves. These verses speak both of clothing and divine acts of power. Psalm 104 speaks of creation; Ps 93 mentions the rising up of floods and God’s power over the waters; Isa 63:2 mentions Edom and implies a bloody encounter there. Although Ps 93:1 does not explicitly mention revelation, the correspondence is generated by the powers of midrashic association. The verse is identified with the giving of Torah because “strength” is a common rabbinic epithet for Torah. In six out of ten cases, however, there is no apparent connection between the verse and the event with which it is identified. These identifications are based solely on the assertion of the paradigm of correspondence. The “extra” references to divine dressing provide a space for the identification of additional acts of divine redemptive intervention.

48. The final comment is based on a punning reading of Isa 63:1: “he (vzê) that is glorious in his apparel.” In its biblical context, the referent of vzê is God. The midrash reads the referent as “the garment” so that the verse means, “the garment that is the most glorious of his garments.”

49. Isa 61:10 does invoke both bridal imagery and dressing imagery. However, in this verse God clothes Israel “as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.” God does not clothe himself. Nevertheless, the conjunction of bridal and clothing language in this verse might have served as the inspiration for the midrash.

50. Even this parallelism is a rabbinic contrivance. The number of “dressing” references depends on how one counts two references in a single verse.

51. Braude and Kapstein (Pesikta, 348) suggest that the eighth verse (Isa 59:17) is associated with Greece because Greek soldiers wore helmets. They suggest that Dan 7:9 is associated with Babylon because white symbolizes the forgiveness which will be marked by the end of the exile. I find these suggestions unconvincing.
These two innovative moves lead to the conclusion that God’s love for Israel is essentially redemptive. Each act of dressing corresponds to an act of divine intervention. With the exception of creation and the giving of Torah, each intervention is a divine defeat of an enemy of Israel. These acts of redemptive intervention, in turn, correspond to Israel’s status as a bride. Thus the midrash asserts that there is an essential connection between Israel’s status as a bride and God’s redemptive acts in history: because God loves and espouses Israel, he defeats her enemies.

While the first eight cases of dressing correspond to past acts of redemption, the ninth and tenth cases, which are selected from the final haftarah of consolation, represent the defeat of Edom/Rome and the defeats of Gog and Magog. Thus, the midrash identifies the final haftarah as the locus of two powerful consolations. The first is paradigmatic: God’s love for Israel is redemptive. The second is messianic: the particular acts of dressing described in the final haftarah correspond to the future acts of divine intervention which will both free Israel from her current subjugation and will insure her eternal, messianic redemption. The midrash explicitly states the message which is indicated implicitly by the redacted form of the final haftarah. Through the redaction of the haftarah, the creators of the lectionary cycle bring together the romantic language of Isa 61:10–11 and 62:3–5 and the bellicose, messianic language of Isa 63:1–7. The redaction of the haftarah asserts that even though these pericopes seem quite disjunctive, they, in fact, belong together. PRK 22:5 makes the same point through the paradigm of correspondence. It identifies Isa 61:10 as a “bride” verse and identifies Isa 63:1 and 63:2 as “dressing” verses. According to the logic of the midrash, they belong together because there is a causal relationship between the espousal of God and Israel and God’s acts of redemption. Thus the pericope serves to underscore and make explicit the theology which is expressed through the redaction and structure of the lectionary sequence.

**Summary**

PRK chapter 22 expands and elaborates on the trope of the erotic, romantic relationship between God and Israel. In the first unit, the petihta structure is used to import a series of traditions regarding Isaac’s miraculous birth into the context of the final haftarah of consolation. Through this strategy, the redactors of the chapter assert that the themes of renewed fertility, miraculous birth and healing, and the obeisance of the nations are imbedded within Isa 61:10. Thus the verse serves as a vehicle for a summation of central themes of the lectionary cycle. This summary, though, is not a mere catalogue of consolatory and redemptive themes. In the midrashic pericope, miraculous fertility and birth are identified as the central
causes for rejoicing. When this pericope is associated with the final haftarah, it serves to identify these themes as the primary causes for rejoicing in the lectionary context as well.

The next unit of chapter 22 adds another valence to the fertility theme: Here, miraculous fertility is a result of the tenacious love of a woman for her husband. Within the context of the lectionary cycle, this assertion resonates with the trope of exhortation. In the petiṭa, the woman’s tenacity leads to reconciliation and fertility. The inclusion of this pericope suggests that Israel’s tenacious expressions of love for God will also lead to reconciliation and restoration.

While the second petiṭa deals with the redemptive power of human love, the final unit describes the redemptive power of divine love. In this pericope, God’s acts of dressing, which correspond to divine interventions in history, are correlated to the times Israel is called bride. This assertion of correspondence suggests that there is a relationship between God’s love for Israel and God’s intervention in history. If God and Israel are married, then God will inevitably intervene in history on Israel’s behalf. The final unit makes explicit the causal connection that is expressed more subtly in the lectionary cycle itself.

**Theology of Consolation and the Culture of the Synagogue**

Thus far, I have demonstrated that the relationship between chapters 13 and 22 of PRK and the lectionary cycle itself is largely complementary. The midrashim highlight and develop themes that are articulated more subtly by the lectionary cycle and introduce additional themes that are relevant to the Tisha b’Av season. Reflection on the midrashim in relation to the culture of the synagogue both underscores areas of overlap and highlights some of the rabbinic specificity of the midrashim.

When read in light of the material culture of the synagogue, the final pericope of PRK chapter 22 serves as a masterful link between the synagogue representations of God as cosmic, mythic creator and the rabbinic representation of God as Israel’s intimate lover. The midrashic pericope quotes from Pss 93 and 104, which describe God in terms which resonate strongly with the images of God as Helios enthroned in the synagogue mosaics. Ps 104:1–2 states, “YHWH, you are clothed in glory and majesty / wrapping light like a garment / you spread the heavens like a tent cloth.” Subsequent verses of the psalm refer to the clouds as God’s chariot and the winds as his messengers. Ps 93 invokes God’s eternal throne and God’s majesty over the waters. These images are all echoed in the synagogue images of *sol invictus* in the center of the zodiac. By invoking these
verses, the midrash aligns itself with a cosmic, mythic strand of theology which echoes that of the synagogue art. In the midrash, however, these verses and the images that they invoke are linked to the “bride” verses, which in turn invoke the theology of intimate reconciliation which is the focus of the seasonal theology of consolation. The midrashic yoking of the “bride” and “clothing” verses also serves to link the rabbinic theology of the season to the ongoing mythic theology which is evidenced by the synagogue iconography.52

As I mentioned in chapter 1, it is difficult to discern the precise significance of the iconography of late antique synagogues. Scholars have posited conflicting readings of the layout of several synagogue mosaics in which the central mosaic panel is flanked by panels representing biblical scenes, temple images and a Torah niche. Zvi Weiss and Ehud Netzer have argued that the Sepphoris mosaic represents a stance toward the temple and temple times that is nostalgic and eschatological; Seth Schwartz has argued that it communicates a sense of the ongoing sacrality and efficacy of the post-destruction Jewish community and its ritual.53 The two perspectives on exile in PRK chapter 13 provide an interesting analogue to these possibilities. In the midrash, the exile is presented both as a site of divine absence and as a site of intense divine presence and attention. The midrash’s artful presentation of the paradox of exile invites us to think about the mosaic floors as icons that granted access to different, potentially contradictory stances toward the relationship between the contemporary community and the defunct temple.

Comparison to the synagogue setting also highlights the striking absence of the temple in PRK’s commentaries on the haftarot of the Tisha b’Av season. Since, for the rabbis, Tisha b’Av was a day of mourning for the destroyed temples, one might expect that the Tisha b’Av season would provide the opportunity for reflection on the temple and expression of whatever sentiments its absence engendered. This expectation would be strengthened both by the importance of the temple elsewhere in rabbinic ideology and its significant presence in both the material culture of the late antique synagogues and the synagogue liturgy developed and codified by the rabbis themselves. Instead of using the Tisha b’Av season lectionary as an occasion to talk about the temple, however, the authors of PRK use it as an occasion to reiterate the narrative of sin-punishment-repentance-redemption and to develop a theology of consolation and of di-

52. I am not arguing that this pericope was composed for the synagogue setting or that its purpose was the linking or appropriation of a popular, mythic theology. Rather, I am suggesting that the pericope’s midrashic linkage can be seen as being in conversation with the theology of the synagogue.

vine presence that is not at all hindered by the absence of the temple. Obviously, this latter notion is not unique to the midrashic commentaries of the Tisha b’Av season. The rabbinic development of functional substitutes for the temple cult is well documented. However, other rabbinic texts, most importantly the statutory liturgy, express some nostalgia for the temple. It is the absence of this nostalgia, or of related fantasies of the eschatological rebuilding of the temple, that is striking. It is difficult to know how to read this silence. It may have been an attempt to deflect preoccupation with the temple in a season when it might have been particularly intense, or it might represent an attempt to offer a counterpoint to the ever-present concern with the temple expressed in the daily liturgy and the synagogue setting.

Conclusion

My analyses of PRK chapters 13 and 22 have demonstrated how the redactors of PRK use the arrangement of pericopes within chapters, and the strategies of the petihta and the davar aher to highlight and expand on themes which are articulated within the lectionary cycle. The redactors of PRK use these midrashic strategies to express these themes in didactic terms which are far more explicit than those of the lectionary cycle itself. In addition, while the midrashic strategies identify the themes of sin-punishment-redemption and the redemptive power of divine love with the texts of the lectionary cycle, the strategies also locate the lectionary texts and themes within the larger complex of written and oral Torah. By importing petihta verses and prooftexts along with their interpretations into the framework of the lectionary texts, the redactors of PRK assert that the themes which are appropriate to the Tisha b’Av lectionary cycle are parts of larger thematic currents which recur in other texts of Torah. The consideration of PRK in relationship to the iconography of the synagogue demonstrates that although the midrashim in PRK are products of the rabbinic academy, they resonate with the theological expressions of synagogue

culture. At the same time, however, comparison with the synagogue art highlights the striking absence of the temple from the Tisha b’Av season midrashim.