

A Lamentation for Gaza and Jerusalem

By Rabbi Gilah Langner

Read on Tisha B'Av, the verses of the biblical book of Eichah/Lamentations have a contemporary resonance in this terrible summer of starvation and destruction in Gaza. Rather than reading Eichah as only being about Jewish suffering, in 2025 we need to expand our reading to the suffering Israel is inflicting on Palestinians in Gaza. Eichah is about physical and spiritual suffering, about being abandoned by others, about owning up to the wrongs that have brought such devastation. In this selection of verses from Eichah, the voices of both Palestine and Israel clamor to be heard, speaking sometimes together, sometimes past each other, pouring out their anger and despair.

Gaza:

Alas!

Lonely sits the city

Once great with people

Jerusalem:

She that was great among nations
Is become like a widow.

There is none to comfort her
Of all her friends.

All her allies have betrayed her;
They have become her foes.

Jerusalem has greatly sinned,
Therefore she is become a mockery.
All who admired her despise her,
She gave no thought to her future;
See, O LORD, my misery;
How the enemy jeers!

All her inhabitants sigh
As they search for bread;
They have bartered their treasures for food,

To keep themselves alive.
See, O LORD, and behold,
How abject I have become!

May it never befall you,
You who pass along the road—
Look around and see:
Is there any agony like mine
Which was dealt out to me?
From above He sent a fire
Down into my bones.
He spread a net for my feet,
He hurled me backward;
He has left me forlorn,
In constant misery.

For these things do I weep,
My eyes flow with tears:
Far from me is any comforter
Who might revive my spirit.

Zion spreads out her hands,
She has no one to comfort her;
The LORD has summoned against
Jacob
His enemies all about him;

My priests and my elders
Have perished in the city
As they searched for food
To keep themselves alive.

Outside the sword deals death;
Indoors, the plague.

Let their wrongdoing come before You,
And deal with them
For my sighs are many,
And my heart is sick.

My eyes are spent with tears,
My heart is in tumult,
My being melts away
Over the ruin of my poor people.

As babes and sucklings languish
In the squares of the city.
They keep asking their mothers,
“Where is bread and wine?”

As they languish like battle-wounded
In the squares of the town,
As their life runs out
In their mothers’ bosoms.

Your seers prophesied to you
Delusion and folly.
They did not expose your iniquity
so as to restore your fortunes,
But prophesied to you oracles
Of delusion and deception.

Lift up your hands to Him
For the life of your infants,

Your seers prophesied to you
Delusion and folly.
They did not expose your iniquity
so as to restore your fortunes,
But prophesied to you oracles
Of delusion and deception.

Arise, cry out in the night
At the beginning of the watches,
Pour out your heart like water
In the presence of the Lord

Who faint for hunger
At every street corner.

See, O LORD, and behold,
Prostrate in the streets lie
Both young and old.

My maidens and youths
Are fallen by the sword;
You slew them on Your day of wrath,
You slaughtered without pity.

I am one who has known affliction
Under the rod of His wrath.

I am one who has known affliction
Under the rod of His wrath.

On none but me He brings down His hand
Again and again, without cease.

He has walled me in and I cannot break out;
He has weighed me down with chains.

Let us search and examine our ways,
And turn back to the LORD;

Let us lift up our hearts with our
hands
To God in heaven:

We have transgressed and rebelled,
And You have not forgiven.

You have made us filth and refuse
In the midst of the peoples.

All our enemies loudly
Rail against us.

Panic and pitfall are our lot,
Death and destruction.

My eyes shed streams of water
Over the ruin of my poor people.

My poor people has turned cruel,
Like ostriches of the desert.

The tongue of the suckling cleaves
To its palate for thirst.
Little children beg for bread;
None gives them a morsel.

Those who feasted on dainties
Lie famished in the streets;
Those who were reared in purple
Have embraced refuse heaps.

Now their faces are blacker than soot,
They are not recognized in the streets;
Their skin has shriveled on their bones,
It has become dry as wood.

Better off were the slain of the sword
Than those slain by famine.

The LORD vented all His fury,
Poured out His blazing wrath;
He kindled a fire in Zion.

Our pursuers were swifter
Than the eagles in the sky;
They chased us in the mountains,
Lay in wait for us in the wilderness.

The breath of our life

Was captured in their traps—
He in whose shade we had thought
To live among the nations.

Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us;
Behold, and see our disgrace!

We have become orphans, fatherless;
Our mothers are like widows.

We must pay to drink our own water,
Obtain our own kindling at a price.

We are hotly pursued;
Exhausted, we are given no rest.

We hold out a hand to Egypt;
To Assyria, for our fill of bread.

We get our bread at the peril of our lives,
Because of the sword of the wilderness.

Our skin glows like an oven,
With the fever of famine.

They have ravished women in Zion,
Maidens in the towns of Judah.

Gone is the joy of our hearts;
Our dancing is turned into mourning.

The crown has fallen from our head;
Woe to us that we have sinned!

Because of this our hearts are sick,
Because of these our eyes are
dimmed:

Why have You forgotten us utterly,
Forsaken us for all time?

Take us back, O LORD, to Yourself,
And let us come back;
Renew our days as of old!