

Evil and the Disruption of Order: A Structural Analysis of the Acrostics in Ekha

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Introduction

The Book of Ekha, traditionally ascribed to Jeremiah (B.T. Baba Batra 15a), is a five-chapter lament written in response to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Except for slight anomalies, four of the five chapters of Ekha constitute an alphabetic acrostic. The first verse begins with an א, the next verse with a ב, etc., until ת. Chapter one contains twenty two verses from א to ת. The same applies to chapter two except for the letters ׃ and ׄ which appear in reverse order. Chapter three is a “triple” acrostic, containing 66 verses, three verses per letter. Here too the letters ׃ and ׄ are reversed. It is noteworthy that chapter 3 is equal in word length to chapter two, both containing 381 words, despite the fact that it has three times the verses. Chapter four contains twenty two verses and the ׃ and ׄ are also reversed. Chapter five, although not an alphabetic acrostic, has a common denominator with chapters one, two and four in that it contains twenty two verses. See Table 1.

Chapter	Reversed Letters	Verses	Words
1	-	22	376
2	׃ and ׄ	22	381
3	׃ and ׄ	66	381
4	׃ and ׄ	22	259
5	Not Applicable	22	145
Totals		154	1,542

Table 1

Aside from those in Ekha, the only other acrostics in the Bible are in Proverbs 31:10-31 (אֶשֶׁת־חַיִל) and Psalms. There are eight acrostics in Psalms. They are symmetrically distributed; four in book one and four in book five. Similar to the acrostics in Ekha, those in Psalms exhibit anomalies. In Psalms some of the acrostics are missing letters in the alphabetic sequence. These anomalies have raised much discussion among commentators, both ancient and modern. Many focus on the question of the reliability of our text, often resulting in tortuous attempts at emendations to recover the missing letters. Some have begun to question the assumption made by modern scholarship that a Hebrew alphabetic acrostic must have originally contained all 22 letters. In our previous study on the four acrostics in Book One of Psalms we have demonstrated that such absent letters in an otherwise perfect acrostic are purposeful.¹ See Table 2.

¹ Ronald Benun, “Evil and the Disruption of Order: A Structural Analysis of the Acrostics in the First Book of Psalms,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 6 Article 5 (2006).

Book	Psalm	Missing Letter(s)	Missing Letter Count	Letter Added To End	Total Letters
1	9/10	צ, פ, ל, ס, נ, מ, ד	7	-	15
1	25	ו and ק	2	פ	20+1=21
1	34	ו	1	פ	21+1=22
1	37	ע	1	-	21
5	111	Complete	0	-	22
5	112	Complete	0	-	22
5	119	Complete	0	-	22
5	145	נ	1	-	20+1=21

Table 2

We will argue that the reversal of the letters ו and פ in chapters 2, 3 and 4 is a literary device which facilitates transmittal of the intended message in Ekha. In addition, we propose that although chapter 5 lacks the form of an alphabetic sequence, the use of precisely 22 verses suggests that it was meant to imitate such an acrostic. A detailed analysis of chapter 5 will reveal how its formation creates a “hidden” acrostic. We will attempt to demonstrate how these anomalies are essential features of the text, enhancing its message by adding another dimension to the prophet’s lament. Awareness of this literary device and what it represents will shed light on our understanding of the acrostics in Psalms and laments of Ekha.²

The Role of Number Symbolism

Before moving on to an overview of Ekha and substantiating the claim made above, it is imperative that we address the functions of certain numbers in the Bible and their symbolism. The reversal of ו and פ is part of a larger system of number symbolism in the Bible that centers around the numbers 7 and 8. In the ancient Near East the number 7 held particular importance. In the Bible, the number 7 and its multiples were used to symbolically represent the old order or an earlier covenant. The letter ו, having a numerical value of 70, therefore represents the old order. The letter פ, numerically equivalent to 80, is a multiple of the number 8. Throughout the Bible the number eight represents G-d’s covenant with Israel. It is the inverse state that 7 and its multiples represent, explained in our article as follows:

The structure based on seven that covers the Psalm may represent evil widespread throughout the world. Eight, on the other hand, must represent something different. Eight is found throughout the Bible as the symbolic number representing God’s covenant with Israel. Most obviously, circumcision is performed on the eighth day. Other examples of such use of symbolism within ages, population counts, word counts, and *gematriot* have been compiled by Rabbi Moshe Shamah based on the previous research of Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon.³ The structure based on eight can be understood as the vision of a future world where adherence to the covenant permeates. Only in such a world will God remove the wicked and allow the righteous to inherit the land.

² Furthermore, this analysis will indicate that the Book of Psalms is rooted and in many ways responding to Ekha.

³ See http://www.judaic.org/general/number_symbolism_vezot2.pdf.

Ekha Overview

In Ekha, Jeremiah describes the destruction and desolation of Jerusalem and the nation from various points of view throughout the lament. The three-dimensional view gives the reader deeper insight into the nightmare at the time of the destruction and allows for a renewed hope at the end of the lament.

Chapter one of Ekha is a complete acrostic containing all letters א to ת in their normal alphabetic sequence. In this chapter, there are two speakers: the Observer (vv. 1-11) and Jerusalem (vv. 12-22). The Observer opens on the rhetorical question,

איכה 1:1 איכה יְשֻׁבָה בְּדָד הָעִיר רַבְתִּי עִם הַיְתָה פְּאַלְמִנָּה רַבְתִּי בְּגוֹיִם שְׂרָתִי בְּמַדִּינֹת הַיְתָה לְמַס:

“How does the city sit solitary, that was full of people! How is she become like a widow! She that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become a vassal!”

This poetic question furnishes the first contrast in Ekha between Jerusalem during her glory days (prior to the destruction), compared to her current state of destitution. The narration of Zion’s suffering spans verses 1-11 in chapter one (the first half of the alphabet, א-כ), aside from two slight interjections in v. 9b and v. 11b where the city cries out to G-d to take notice how abject she has become. In verses 12-22 (letters ל-ת) the narration is brought from the perspective of the city, who first describes her own state to the passersbys with no one to console her (vv. 11b-16). Jerusalem’s speech is interrupted in v. 17 by the narrator’s statement in the third person that there is no one to console Jerusalem. In vv. 18-22, the city continues her speech, justifying her punishment, addressing the nations, requesting that He punish the enemies who delight in her downfall.

Chapter two opens on another rhetorical question:

איכה 1:2 איכה יַעִיב בְּאַפּוֹ אֲדֹנָי אֶת בֵּית צִיּוֹן הַשְּׁלִיךְ מִשָּׁמַיִם אֶרֶץ תַּפְאֲרָתָהּ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא זָכַר הַדָּם רַגְלָיו בְּיָוֶם אַפּוֹ:

“How has Hashem covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven to earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger!”

In vv. 1-19, the narrator resumes speaking, beginning with an objective, albeit impassioned, detailed description of how G-d destroyed the city as if he were her enemy (vv. 1-10, letters א-י), followed by a subjective description of his personal distress over what happened⁴ (vv. 11-12, letters כ-ל). Verses 1-10 takes the form of a detailed list of G-d’s punishments. When he sees the heart-wrenching imagery of the starving children in the square of the city, he breaks down and his eyes are spent with tears and his heart is in a tumult- כָּלֹו בְּדַמְעוֹת עֵינָי הִמְרַמְרוּ מְעַי (v.11). This description prompts the narrator to address the city in the second person in vv. 13-20 (letters מ-ר with the ו and פ reversed), admitting that there is nothing that can be compared to her suffering, and all attempts at consolation are futile. At the closing of chapter two (v.20) just like in the closing of chapter one, the city turns to G-d employing the same words as chapter one, רֵאה יהוה, asking that He behold the outcome of his actions that resulted in one of the most horrifying sights one

⁴ Alternatively, the speaker here may be the city personified, crying over the destruction of her inhabitants.

can witness– the cannibalism of women eating their own children. Priests and prophets are slain on the temple grounds. Men and women of all ages are strewn about the streets on that day that God slaughtered without pity. In the final verse of chapter two, Jerusalem states that G-d summoned Her enemies from “roundabout,”⁵ who consumed the people the city bore and reared - אָשֶׁר טָפְחָתִי וְרַבִּיתִי - recalling the opening words of Ekha where the city is described as one filled with people- רַבְתִּי עִם (1:1).

Standing in stark contrast to the previous two chapters in Ekha, which detailed the sufferings of the city, chapter 3 turns to the suffering of the narrator, i.e. Jeremiah, who speaks in the first person throughout the duration of the chapter. The change in content is accompanied by a change in form such that instead of each letter of the alphabet receiving one verse, each letter receives three consecutive verses, i.e., three א verses, followed by three ב verses and so forth, thus creating a “triple” acrostic. As in chapter two, the verses for the letters ו and פ are reversed. In the first part of chapter three, Jeremiah describes his personal suffering that G-d subjected him to (vv. 1-21, א-ז); he recalls how he was made distant from God (vv. 8/9 the letter ג), the laughingstock of all the people (v. 14, ה), and believed that his hope and strength from G-d had ceased (v. 18, ו). In verses 21/22 through verse 39 (מ-ח) there is a drastic change in the tone of Ekha. Up to this point, the reader was given little hope that the situation had any positive aspect or optimistic message. It is with the turn from the final ו verse in chapter 3 to the first ח verse that a glimmer of hope radiates through the otherwise utterly devastating narrative in Ekha⁶. In this section (vv. 21/22- 39) Jeremiah reinstates hope when he recalls G-d’s unending goodness and kindness.⁷ He emphasizes the goodness with the triple heading of the ו verses utilizing the word for goodness – טוב.⁸ This burst of optimism is followed by a detailed section where the narrator speaks in the first person plural imploring the nation to repent (vv. 40-47). After lamenting over the national destruction in vv. 48-51, Jeremiah describes his past experience that G-d comes through for those who pray, even though he admitted earlier in the chapter (v 8) that G-d shuts out his prayer⁹ (vv. 52-58).

⁵ The Hebrew term used is מגורֵי מַסְבִּיב. The use of this word may have a double entendre as Jeremiah may be reflecting on his personal enemies as well, using the same term - מגורֵי מַסְבִּיב - he used to describe Pashhur in Jeremiah 20:3.

⁶ The significance of the letters 7 and 8 will be elaborated below. The second ה verse in 3:23 הַדְּשִׁים לְבָקָרִים, plays off Haazinu מְקָרֹב בָּאוּ הַדְּשִׁים מְקָרֹב (32:17). הַדְּשִׁים לְבָקָרִים and מְקָרֹב בָּאוּ share almost all their letters. הַדְּשִׁים לְבָקָרִים is also a reference to Jeremiah בְּרִית הַדְּשָׁה (31:30). The number of words in the verses of chapter 3 is also significant. There are only two verses with a length of eight words: v. 24, which begins with ה, and v. 48, which begins with פ. The only 8 word verses are the last verses of the ה and פ sets, the letters representing 8. The first two verses in the ה set contain, respectively, 9 words (the longest in the chapter) and 4 words, the shortest in the chapter. Altogether, the number of words in the three ה verses add up to 21 (9+4+8) which equals 13 + 8, two numbers used within the new covenant. The center verse begins with the word הַדְּשִׁים, reminding us of the significance of ה as the symbol of the new covenant. הַדְּשִׁים is the 880th word of Ekha and is contained in the 88th verse counting from the end of the book.

⁷ It is within these positively toned verses that we find Jeremiah’s signature: v.24 - חֶלְקִי יְהוָה, contains Jeremiah’s name בְּן חֶלְקִיָּהוּ. יְהוָה חֶלְקִי יְהוָה becomes חֶלְקִי בְּיְהוָה in Ekha 4:16. Notice that both times the root חלק is used it is right next to YHVH.

⁸ The word טוב begins the ו verse of many other acrostics: Pss 112:5; 119:65, (66), 68, 71, 72; 145:9. In addition, the word טובים heads the ו verse in Ekha 4:9. The ו verse in Ekha 2:9 begins with the word טָבְעוּ, a play on the word טוב.

⁹ This message corresponds with the message of the acrostics in book one, particularly Ps. 34. There we explained that “while the acrostic of Pss 9/10 was a meditation on the effects of evil, Pss 25 and 34 bring us

Similar to chapter one, chapter 3 closes with a plea that G-d destroy his enemies, specifically those that seek to harm him.

Chapter 4, like chapters 1 and 2 opens on a rhetorical question using the same *איכה* word, here asked twice. The word *איכה* once more underscores the contrast between Jerusalem's inhabitants prior to the destruction and after the destruction. The narrator opens chapter 4 expressing his astonishment at the current reality, as in chapter one.

איכה 1: 4 *איכה יועם זהב? שגא הכתם הטוב תשתפכנה אבני קדש בראש כל חוצות:*
איכה 2: 4 *בני ציון היקרים המסלאים בפז איכה נחשבו לנבלי חרש מעשה? די יוצר:*

“How is the gold become dim! How is the most fine gold changed! The hallowed stones are poured out at the top of every street. The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!”

Jeremiah continues to speak in chapter 4 through verse 16 in the third person about the nation and the city, as he did in chapter 2. He uses graphic detail to describe the famine and suffering during the siege and capture of the city. He describes the fate of the various objects and creatures going from the inanimate (gold, v. 1) to animals (v. 3) to children (v. 4) to the poor (v. 6) and finally the elect (v. 7). He laments over their current state while reminding them that they are to blame. Their priests and prophets killed innocent people, their kings thought they were invincible, and the entire nation's sins surpassed those of Sodom and Gomorrah. In verses 17-21 the nation speaks in the first person plural recognizing that the loss of their national independence was largely due to the fact that they relied on other nations and upon their king instead of G-d. In the closing words of the nation, like chapters 1 and 3, they pray for recompense to be given to the enemy. Verse 22 closes on the prophet declaring that their punishment for their sins has been completely expiated and G-d will no longer punish them and will punish Edom instead.¹⁰

The final chapter in Ekha is the most curious of all. Breaking from the strict acrostic form in Ekha, chapter five maintains the 22 verse structure of an acrostic, but does not follow the alphabetic sequence. In chapter five, the nation speaks in the first person plural form, (as in vv. 17-21 of chapter 4) recalling the suffering to which they were subjected. The chapter opens on the nation turning to Hashem in a call that He should remember the suffering of the nation - *זכר יהוה מה היה לנו* - and in v. 20 closes on the plea that G-d should not forget the nation forever - *למה לצח תשכחנו*. In the middle, vv. 2-19 the nation briefly summarizes its past suffering and acknowledges that its future is with God. The summary takes the form of a detailed list like that in chapter 2. Ekha closes on the nations prayer that Hashem take it back and renew the days of old (v. 21) - *השיבנו יהוה אלני ונשובה*.

into the real world where the wicked prosper, and the downtrodden have nowhere to turn. In this world, God is not yet present. Ps 25 encourages prayer, even though it seems hopeless. Ps 34 backs up that encouragement with historical instances where prayer was effective” (See Benun, “Evil and the Disruption of Order: A Structural Analysis of the Acrostics in the First Book of Psalms, p. 158).

¹⁰ The “שישי ושמחי בת אדום” of chapter 4:21 is a reaction to 1:21 - “ששו בי אתה עשית”.

The ν and ϕ Reversals

To date, no sufficient answer has been offered to explain the anomaly of the reversal of ν and ϕ in chapters 2, 3, and 4.¹¹ Scholars have attempted to address the anomaly by suggesting reversal of the ν/ϕ verses,¹² attributing authorship of chapters 2-4 to another writer,¹³ or by proposing that these chapters used an alternate alphabet system. In our view, these attempts underestimate the underlying message Jeremiah embedded within the acrostics. As we further examine the structure of Ekha, we find that the text is tightly structured, each letter and word having been taken into account.

In chapter 1 of Ekha, the normal alphabetic sequence is used with the letter ν preceding the letter ϕ . That chapter 1's follows the normal alphabetic sequence increases the reader's expectation that the subsequent chapters follow that same pattern. In chapter 2, the reversal becomes a striking and a blatant disruption of the alphabetic sequence. The reversal of the six ν and ϕ verses in chapter 3, followed by the same reversal in chapter 4 support the claim that the reversals are an intentional literary technique.

Chapter 2's reversal is presented as follows:

איכה 2: 16 פָּצוּ עֲלֵיךְ פִּיהֶם כָּל אוֹיְבֶיךָ שָׂרוּ וַיִּחַרְקוּ שֹׁן אָמְרוּ בְּלִעְנֵנוּ אַךְ זֶה הַיּוֹם שֶׁקִּוִּינָהוּ מִצְאָנוּ רְאִינוּ :
 איכה 2: 17 עֲשֵׂה יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר זָמַם בַּצֵּעַ אֶמְרָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר צָוָה מִימֵי קֶדֶם הָרַס וְלֹא חָמַל וַיִּשְׁמַח עֲלֵיךְ אוֹיְבֵי הָרִים קָרָן
 צָרִיךְ :

Verse 16 should have started with an ν but instead starts with the letter ϕ in the word פָּצוּ. Upon closer observation, one notices that it is followed by the word עֲלֵיךְ which begins with ν that is supposed to begin the verse, is followed by the word פִּיהֶם beginning with the letter ϕ - the letter that continues the alphabetic sequence. Thus, the two words that follow the unexpected ϕ contain the expected $\nu\phi$ sequence. Before attributing this to mere coincidence, one has to look at the next letter reversal in chapter 3. The first five words of the ϕ verse in chapter 3 are a duplicate of the ϕ verse in chapter 2 except that in this chapter the suffixes of the second and fifth words changes from second-person singular to first-person plural. The first three words of the phrase also occur in Psalm 22:14 as פָּצוּ עֲלֵי פִיהֶם. This פ-ע-פ three word sequences occur 11 other times in the Bible.¹⁴ Once again, the narrator is indicating that the reversal is intentional. Note that the first two letters of the word פָּצוּ form the sequence פ-צ, the normal alphabetic sequence, as opposed to the present פ-ע-צ.

פָּצוּ עֲלֵינוּ פִּיהֶם כָּל אוֹיְבֵינוּ :	איכה 3: 46
פָּחַד וּפְחַת הָיָה לָנוּ הַשָּׂאת וְהַשְׁבֵּר :	איכה 3: 47
פָּלְגֵי מַיִם תִּרְדַּע עֵינַי עַל שִׁבְרֵי בֵּת עַמִּי :	איכה 3: 48
עֵינַי נִגְרָה וְלֹא תִדְמָה מֵאֵין הַפְּגוֹת :	איכה 3: 49
עַד יִשְׁקִיף וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה מִשְׁמַיִם :	איכה 3: 50
עֵינַי עוֹלָלָה לְנַפְשִׁי מִכָּל בְּנוֹת עִירֵי :	איכה 3: 51

¹¹ Chapter 4 verse 17 not only reverses the ν and ϕ but is the only verse in Ekha that begins and ends with an ν .

¹² See for example: Gordis, Robert. "A Commentary on the Text of Lamentations." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 57 (1967).

¹³ See, for example, Olam HaTanakh

¹⁴ Gen. 1:11, Gen. 38:29, Ex. 38:21, Lev. 26:30, Num. 13:3, 2Kings 4:34, Jer. 32:4, Ek. 29:2, Mal. 2:3, Ps. 22:14, Job 16:14, Pro. 29:5, Lam. 2:16, Lam. 3:46

Although chapter 5 of Ekha does not follow the alphabetic sequence, it is preceded by four chapters of complete acrostics (aside from the reversals of the 17th and 18th letter), and contains 22 verses thereby maintaining the same number of verses as an alphabetic acrostic. Although one could argue that these facts are coincidental, the absence of an acrostic in chapter 5 appears to be intentional, akin to the reversal of the ν and ϕ . The reader is automatically prompted to treat the 22 verses in chapter 5 as an acrostic. He is startled to see that not one letter in chapter 5 heads the verse that we would expect, had it been an alphabetic acrostic. However, here as in chapters 2-4, the reversal of the letters ν and ϕ are important factors in the analysis of the would-be acrostic. It is important to note that chapter 5 contains an unusually high occurrence of the letter ν . Five of its verses begin with ν ,¹⁵ which is a statistically high number of times for a verse to begin with ν . Less than 2% of verses in Bible begin with ν , as compared with 25% of verses in Ekha 5. Of particular interest is verse 17 which begins with the letter ν . The 17th position is where we would expect the letter ϕ to be in an acrostic, but is the proper place for the ν if the ϕ and ν are switched. If so, the only letter in chapter 5 in its consistent position is the verse for the letter ν . If one analyzes chapter 5 as an acrostic one finds that “the acrostic” is utterly disrupted. The only letter in chapter 5 that maintains its earlier position from chapters 2-4 is ν .

The disruption of the acrostic at the letters ν and ϕ is augmented by the fact that these two letters were also the sources of disruption and thematic symbolism in the acrostics in Psalms.¹⁶ The letters ν and ϕ are part of the seven missing letters in the acrostic that span Psalms 9 and 10. The letter ν is the only missing letter in Psalm 37. In Psalms 25 and 34 an additional verse, beginning with the letter ϕ , is placed after the τ of the acrostic. The theme of both these verses reflects the symbolic function of the letter ϕ . Psalm 25:22 begins $\text{אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲלֶקִים פָּדָה}$ and 34:23 begins $\text{פָּדָה יְקִיֵּץ נַפְשׁ עַבְדֶּיךָ}$, recognizing G-d's redemptive efforts and praying for G-d to redeem Israel and the “soul of His servants.” Thus, these verses, which begin with ϕ , thematically represent the very task that the ϕ undertakes in the acrostic Psalms – to redeem Israel and restore order!

It is also important to note that even the complete acrostics play on the letters ν and ϕ . The sister psalms 111 and 112 are two back-to-back acrostics and their alphabetic structures are duplicates of each other. Each one consists of 10 verses with two letters of the alphabet per verse for the first eight verses, thus covering 16 letters α through ν . Following that are three letters of the alphabet per verse for the last two verses thus covering 6 letters ϕ through τ . Thus the letters ν and ϕ are the breaking point between two verse-structures in an otherwise perfect acrostic (see Table 2).

In Psalm 37 the letter ν and its blatant omission in the acrostic lay at the crux of the Psalm's message. In our article on the acrostics in Book One of Psalms¹⁷ we explained

¹⁵ Since there are 5 verses in Ekha 5 that begin with ν , this leaves 17 non- ν verses. The number 17 represents ϕ in the normal alphabetic sequence (the 17th letter). In Ekha, however, the ν/ϕ reversal makes ν represent the 17th position. This creates the effect that every verse in chapter 5 represents ν - either by beginning with ν , or by being part of the 17 verses that do not begin with ν .

¹⁶ See Table 2

¹⁷ See note 1.

that the letter ν represented evil, and the replacement of the ν verse signifies righteousness prevailing over evil. See the following excerpt:

If indeed the ν verse is missing purposefully, we wonder what its significance is. What does ν represent? We notice that ν 29 which should have begun with the letter ν does not; instead we find the word צדיקים. If we formulate this as a logical equation “not $\nu = \text{צדיקים}$ ” then perhaps we can derive from its negation that “ $\nu = \text{רשע}$.” In other words, in the spot where $\nu = \text{רשע}$ is missing we find righteousness. Keeping in mind that word counts are very significant in this psalm, we further notice that the word רשע appears fourteen times— a multiple of seven. Seven and the letter ν seem to represent evil.

The picture comes together by understanding ν 10 as a self-reflective statement about the text of this psalm itself. On its surface this verse is part of the wisdom narrative: “soon, the wicked will be no more.” But on a deeper level, it provides an instruction as to how to read the continuation of the psalm. “And in a little while there will be no wicked person, you will analyze (והתבוננת) his place (מקומו) but he will not be there (ואיננו).” Anyone who has reviewed this acrostic, looked for the ν verse, analyzed where it belongs and noticed that it is missing will immediately sympathize with ν 10. ν is the place where we expect to find evil but the ν verse is missing.

There are more indications that the numbers 7 (old order) and 8 (new covenant) and their multiples play into the structure of Ekha. This can be observed in the placement of G-d’s name throughout the text. In the first 70 words of Ekha there is no occurrence of G-d’s name. The first time G-d’s name appears is in the 71st word. The second occurrence of G-d’s name is at the 150th word, thus there are 80 words between the first two occurrences of G-d’s name. In other words, a 70 word span without G-d’s name is followed by an 80 word span enveloped by G-d’s name. The lack of G-d’s name in the first 70 words characterizes the covenant based on 7 where G-d’s presence is missing. In contrast, G-d encompasses the covenant based on 8.¹⁸ This certainly ties in with the reversal of the letters ν and ϕ which have a numerical value of 70 and 80.

Other patterns based on the occurrences of the letters ν and ϕ are also significant. Note that the letters ν and ϕ occur together in exactly 70 verses of Ekha. Once more, the number 70 is used to symbolize that the old order of 7 has taken over the new covenant of 8.¹⁹ In addition, there are 17 verses in Ekha which contain no ν or ϕ . Ordinarily, the letter ϕ is the 17th letter of the alphabet, however, in Ekha the ν has replaced the ϕ , and so the letter ν represents the number 17.

Chapter 5 and Ekha's Conclusion

In the last four verses of the final chapter of Ekha the lament concludes with a prayer for G-d’s redemption. Through further analysis of this chapter's structure, division, and theme, the concluding inspirational tone sets the stage for the lament to function as a base

¹⁸ There are 32 occurrences of YHVH in Ekha which is a multiple of 8.

¹⁹ The letter ϕ occurs 98 times within those seventy verses. 98 is a multiple of 7 and is equal to the age at which Eli dies. Eli himself represents the old order. Thus, ironically, the number of occurrences of ϕ , the symbol of the 8 covenant, represents the 7 covenant.

for cross-referencing with Psalms. We will now return to the structural analysis of chapter 5 in order to elaborate on its role.

As noted earlier, chapter 5, being a “hidden” acrostic, only retains acrostic consistency with the letter ν . Not only does the ν supplant the ρ 's position but it begins a total of 5 verses of the 22 verse chapter. In verse 17, not only is the ρ replaced, but the verse begins and ends with an ν . In addition to the ρ , the ν replaces the verses that should have begun letters η , ι , κ , λ . Each of these letters was purposely replaced by an ν to shape the chapter's structure and ensure that the theme is conveyed. Through these letter replacements the concluding praise of and prayer to G-d is highlighted.

The replacement of the ι position follows the reasoning of the ρ 's replacement in this chapter and chapters 2 and 3. As discussed earlier, the numerical ι and its multiples, particularly 80, represent the new order and the renewed covenant. In chapter 5 the ν 's replacement of the ι complements the replacement of the ρ . Together they embolden the remarkable and blatant observation of the ν being the only common denominator between chapters 2 through 4 and chapter 5.

The next ν replacement is in the κ position, verse 10. The suggested reasoning behind substituting the κ rests in a peculiar observation when comparing the κ verses among chapters 2, 3, and 5:

... הָעֵלּוּ עֶפְרַיִם עַל-רָאשָׁם...	איכה 2: 10
... יִתֵּן בְּעֶפְרַיִם פִּיהוּ...	איכה 3: 29
... מִפְּנֵי זִלְעָפוֹת הָעֵבֶר	איכה 5: 10

These three verses – the κ verse of chapter 2, the middle κ verse of chapter 3, and the κ position of chapter 5 – contain the only three words in all of Ekha that constitute an ν followed by a ρ . This observation, while lacking in chapter 4, serves as a facilitator for a potentially deeper connection between these verses and their connection to ν/ρ .

In our studies on the acrostics in Psalms²⁰, the κ was understood as the letter that restores order, “with the call for G-d to act and punish the wicked.” The ν consequently became representative of the last moment of chaos and disorder, at the final juncture before G-d is called upon to rid evil. This symbolism relates to chapter 5 and its structure. The last of the five ν 's (v. 18) is placed in the position of the ν , directly before the following verse's prayer and praise of G-d. Furthermore, the content of the would-be ν verse describes the apex of chaos and destruction where “Mount Zion... lies desolate; [and] jackals prowl over it.” Thus the replacement of the ν with the last ν acts as a marker of separation partitioning the last four verses from the 17 that precede it.

The remaining ν replacement to address in chapter 5 is the letter η (v. 5). Seemingly, this replacement is acting as a counter marker of separation to the ν 's partition in verse 18. Together, these partitions create an eight verse envelope around a middle section that contains the five ν verses. Three delineated sections become evident – the first four

²⁰ See note 1.

verses, the next 14 containing the ע's, and the last four verses of prayer, hope, and inspiration.

Now that we can distinguish the last four verses from chapter 5, we can better appreciate their message:

אתה יהוה לעולם תשב, כסאך לדור ודור.	איכה 5:19
למה לנצח תשכחנו, תעזבנו לארץ ימים.	איכה 5:20
השיבנו יהוה אליך ונשוב, חדש ימינו בקדום.	איכה 5:21
כי אם-מאס מאסתנו, קצפת עלינו עד-מאד.	איכה 5:22

This unit begins with Jeremiah turning to G-d and praising His everlasting throne (v. 19). The praise turns into prayer in the two follow-up verses calling for G-d to “renew our days as of old”. Astonishingly, verse 19 has only one parallel in the entire Bible. In Psalm 9:8 the narrator states ויהוה לעולם ישב כונן למשפט כסאו. These verses, being the only two attestations of these word combinations in the Bible, cross-reference each other and play off each other in a remarkable way. In Ekha the lamenter prays to G-d with this praising introduction, and in Psalm 9 the narrator expresses the reality and actualization of G-d’s grand redemption. Using the acrostics and the literary devices, Jeremiah was better able to capture the dismal position of the nation and their morale, as well as successfully transition into a mode of praying and yearning for the restoration of order.