WHO WAS LAMENTING AND WHY? LAMENTATIONS AND THE SUMERIAN CITY LAMENTS

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Shortly after the first Sumerian City Laments were translated in the early twentieth century, scholars noticed their thematic and phraseological parallels to the Biblical book of Lamentations. The Sumerian City Laments grieve the destruction of central Sumerian cities during the fall of the third dynasty of Ur in 2004 BCE,[1] just as the book of Lamentations grieves the fall of Jerusalem, 1500 years later.[2] This paper focuses on some of the similarities and differences in Lamentations and the Sumerian City Laments.

BIBLICAL LAMENTATIONS

Within the biblical literature of trauma, there are texts that are tied to pain and suffering. Foremost among them is the book of Lamentations (*Eicha* or "How").[3]

A major theme of Lamentations is loneliness.[4] The word *badad* (lonely) appears twice in Lamentations: *Lonely sits the city, once great with people!* (Lam. 1:1); *It is good for a man, when young, To bear a yoke; Let him sit alone and be patient, when He has laid it upon him*. (Lam. 3:27-28).[5] The image of Jerusalem sitting all alone (*badad*) focuses attention on the pain of Jerusalem's desolation, the abandonment of her loved ones, her status within the world, or some combination of these experiences.

To illustrate the city's pain and loss, the first verse compares Jerusalem to a widow (*almana*), evoking her vulnerability; the Bible often makes provisions for the special care that society should afford for its weaker members, often specifying the widow, the orphan, and the stranger (e.g. Ex. 22:20-23; Deut. 10: 18).

The situation of Judah after the destruction of Jerusalem is desperate: *She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has none to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her;*

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they have become her enemies (Lam. 1:2). Judah's friends and allies not only abandoned her but they also dealt treacherously with her. Faced with the possibility of reprisal for supporting Judah, her allies not only assumed an attitude of indifference but they also became hostile to her situation. Left alone to confront the powerful Babylonian army, Judah's army was no match against the invading forces.[6]

When Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon burned the temple and destroyed Jerusalem, the initial reaction was one of overwhelming grief and sadness: *Alas! Lonely sits the city once great with people! She that was great among nations is become like a widow; The princess among states is become a thrall* (Lam. 1:1).

Chapter 3 switches to the first person so Jerusalem is speaking like one who is pursued and abused, beaten by an angry and violent master:

> *I am the man who has known affliction under the rod of His wrath; Me he drove on and on in unrelieved darkness; On none but me He brings down His hand again and again, without cease. He has worn away my flesh and skin; He has shattered my bones. All around me He has built misery and hardship; He has made me dwell in darkness, like those long dead. He has walled me in and I cannot break out; He has weighed me down with chains. And when I cry and plead, He shuts out my prayer; He has walled in my ways with hewn blocks, He has made my paths a maze. He is a lurking bear to me, a lion in hiding; He has forced me off my way and mangled me, He has left me numb* (Lam. 3:1-11).

The descriptions of God's wrath, anger, and His consuming rage, divert attention from the people's guilt and focus attention on their suffering. Children crying for bread, children starving to death, women raped, men abused:

> *Alas! The gold is dulled, debased the finest gold, the sacred gems are spilled at every street corner. The precious children of Zion; Once valued as gold– alas, they are accounted as earthen pots, work of a potter's hands! Even jackals offer the breast and suckle their young; But 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 give them a morsel. Those who feasted on dainties lie famished in the streets; Those who were reared in*

> *purple have embraced refuse heaps. The guilt of my poor people exceeded the iniquity of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment, without a hand striking it. Her elect were purer then snow, whiter then milk; Their limbs were ruddier then coral, their bodies were like sapphire. Again, the description of the physical beauty of the beloved, now their faces are blacker then 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, who pined away, [as though] wounded, for lack of the fruits of the field. With their own hands, tenderhearted women have cooked their children; Such became their fare, in the disaster of my poor people* (Lam. 4:1-10).

Another female image to depict Judah and Jerusalem who merges into one figure is "the Daughter of Zion". She is a personification of Jerusalem who appears first as the deity's beloved Daughter, a spokeswoman for the people's grief.

Subsequent verses blame the daughter of Zion explicitly for her tragedy. She suffers *for the multitude of her transgressions* (Lam. 1: 5); she has *sinned grievously, so she has become a mockery* (Lam. 1:8). *Her uncleanness was in her skirts; she took no thought of her future* (Lam. 1:9). The Daughter of Zion's uncleanness arises from her adultery and disregard for the future (Lam. 1:9) and has made her "unclean" among her enemies (Lam. 1:17). *All who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness* (Lam. 1:8). In Ancient Israel, the exposure of the body caused disgrace, and stripping was part of the punishment of unfaithful women: *Rebuke your mother, rebuke her for she is not my wife and I am not her husband. Let her put away her harlotry from her face and her adultery from between her breasts or I will strip her naked and leave her as on the day she was born: and I will make her like a wilderness, like desert land, and let her die of thirst* (Hosea 2:4-5).

In the second half of chapter 1, the Daughter of Zion explains the disaster that befell the community: the sin and infidelity of the people, not God's failure, brought tragedy. The daughter of Zion is abused, beaten, and tortured by the one whom she trusted. She laments her afflictions and names their source. God caused them *on the day of his fierce anger. From on high he sent fire; it*

went deep into my bones; he spread a net for my feet; he turned me back; he has left me stunned, faint all day long (Lam. 1:12–13).

She complains about the way passersby treat her suffering as if it were trivial, urging them: *Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow* (Lam. 1:12). She blames God for trapping her: *The yoke of my offenses is bound fast, lashed tight by His hand; imposed upon my neck, it saps my strength; The Lord has delivered me into the hands of those I cannot withstand. The Lord in my midst has rejected all my heroes; He has proclaimed a set time against me to crush my young men. As in a press the Lord has trodden Fair Maiden Judah* (Lam. 1:13–15). She cries for her isolation, for the abuse she has received, and for the isolation of her children at the hands of her enemy: *For these things do I weep, my eyes flow with tears. Far from me is any comforter who might revive my spirit; My children are forlorn for the foe has prevailed* (Lam. 1:16).

She begs God to avenge her against her enemies and to afflict them as she has been afflicted: *When they heard how I was sighing, there was none to comfort me; All my foes heard of my plight and exulted. For it is Your doing: You have brought on the day that You threatened. Oh, let them become like me! Let all their wrongdoing come before You, and deal with them as You have dealt with me for all my transgressions. My sighs are many, and my heart is sick* (Lam. 1:21–22).

Finally, in chapter 2, she abandons self-recrimination altogether and shouts in outrage at God for killing the young women and men of the city, for *slaughtering them without mercy* (Lam. 2:21). She discards the role of victim to become God's adversary (Lam. 1), challenging divine "mistreatment" of herself and her people:

> *See, the LORD, and behold, to whom you have done this! Women eat their own fruit, their new-born babes! Priest and prophet are slain in the Sanctuary of the Lord! 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. You summoned, as on a festival, my neighbors from roundabout. On the day of the wrath of God none survived or escaped; those whom I bore and reared my foe has consumed* (Lam. 2:20–22).

The Daughter of Zion insists that if God really saw the plight of her people, He would do something about it. She demands that He "look" and *consider to whom you have done this* (Lam. 2:20): *See how distressed I am* (Lam. 1:20).

Many scholars have written about the ideas and theology of the Lamentations. For example, Hillers emphasizes that although the facts about the fall of Jerusalem are already described in the Bible, Lamentations "supplies the meaning of the facts," not just the actual fall of the city of Jerusalem, but the spiritual significance behind it. Lamentations is also a confirmation of the prophetic judgement on the sin of the people.[7]

Berlin writes that the focus of Lamentations is on the "event itself". Aside from the last few verses, "Lamentations does not look forward and does not look back, does not dwell on what went before or will come after – its gaze is fixed directly on the event itself."[8]

SUMERIAN CITY LAMENTS AND LAMENTATIONS

The Sumerian City Laments describe the destruction of the city, the mass killing of its inhabitants, and the loss of its central temple. They give special attention to the divine sphere from which the gods order the destruction of the city, as well as the city's patron gods who beg them to change their decision. The patron gods are forced to abandon their cities prior to, or simultaneously with, the destruction. The patron deities live as deportees in foreign cites, lamenting their devastated shrine. Eventually, after the destruction, they are invited to return and renew their position(s).

Just as the deportee goddess in the Ur cries: "I am one who can find no rest" (Ur Lament l. 360), an almost identical phrase describes the exiled daughter of Zion *she found no rest* (Lam. 1:3). Similarly, the lack of musicians in the destroyed city appears in both the Sumerian City Laments and Lamentations: "They are no longer playing for you the *šem* and *ala* drums that gladden the heart, nor the *tigi*" (Ur Lament 356); *The old men are gone from the gate, the young men from their music* (Lam. 5:14).

Both the Sumerian City Laments and Lamentations use the image of pitchers, or potsherds, as a metaphor for dying people: "Its people littered its sides like potsherds" (Ur Lament 211); *The precious children of Zion. Once valued as gold, alas, they are accounted as earthen pots, work of a potter's hands* (Lam. 4: 2).

Another example is the "fox in the ruins" image, which is shared by the Sumerian City Laments and Lamentations: "In the rivers of my city, dust has gathered, foxholes are made therein" (Ur Lament 269); *Because of Mount Zion, which lies desolate; Foxes walk over it* (Lam. 5:17).

WHY WERE THEY LAMENTING?

Each civilization has its own set of philosophical and theological assumptions, and each wrestles differently with the challenges involved in the extraordinary phenomenon of destruction. This is evident in both the Sumerian City Laments and Lamentations. The over-riding themes in both seem to have been how to deal with the "devastation" caused by deities; in what terms should divine involvement be treated; and what is the possibility of restoring the relationship with a deity who has abandoned his people and city (or alternatively demolished them). A theological comparison between the two traditions sheds light on the unique features of each culture and on its specific theology.[9]

Briefly, in neither Lamentations nor the Sumerian Laments do the people interact directly with the deity bringing destruction but rather the "discussion" is through an intermediary (the goddesses in the Sumerian Laments and the Daughter of Zion in Lamentations). One possible reason as to why that is so, is that in in the Sumerian Laments the people never had a relationship with the supreme gods. Lamentations represents the distancing and estrangement of the people from God which caused the destruction. When the people return to Judah, it is not the Daughter of Zion that returns but the people return to God and the land, as opposed to the gods returning to their shrine.

SUMERIAN CITY LAMENTS

In the Sumerian City Laments, the destruction of the city and its temple involve an overall cosmological chaos. The physical destruction is the infrastructure of the city's existence including the city's "plans", "rituals", and "rational judgment". The "divine powers" of the "city-of-holiest-divine-powers" were overturned and the rites of the "divine powers" were changed. In Eridu everything was reduced to ruin and in confusion (Eridu Lament 15–17). The devastation of these infrastructures meant an abrupt loss of the city's wealth, honor, and fertility, and the collapse of all the social institutions.

Priests abandoned their offices; shepherds burned their pens; men neglected their wives and sons; mothers looked away from their daughters; wives were abandoned; children were abandoned; possessions were scattered about and the people moaned (Ur Lament 232–234).

Abnormal climatic phenomena, such as dimmed daylight and blazing fire, were associated with the destruction: "In front of the storm, a fire blazes, the people moan. With the raging storm, a fiery glow burns. At noon, when the fog usually dissipates, the fire blazes. At midday, when a bright sun usually rises, the somber "storm-day" scorched. In the land, the bright sun did not rise; like a twilight star it dawned" (Ur Lament 187–192).

According to the Sumerian City Laments, the generators of the destruction were the "great gods," especially the chief god, Enlil. They decided to destroy the city (Sumer and Ur Lament 1–55), and carried out this decision either by themselves, or with the help of minor deities and demons.[10]

In comparison, ancient Israel did not have the same fear of a population explosion described in contemporaneous Ancient Near Eastern literature (such as in the Uruk Lament and the Atrahasis Epic.[11] Indeed, biblical texts stress the desirability and importance of children: Beginning with Genesis, the numerous genealogical lists demonstrate the continued emphasis on the importance of progeny. Procreation was a commandment and God's blessings bestowed on Israel always included fecundity (Ex. 23:26; Lev. 26:9; Deut. 7:14; Deut. 28:11), to the extent that the unusual fertility of the Israelites in Egypt antagonized and worried the Egyptians: *But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and spread out, so that the [Egyptians] came to dread the Israelites* (Ex. 1:12). Israelite children were *a heritage of the Lord* (Psa. 127:3–5); *and your wife will be as a fruitful vine* (Psa. 128:3–4) was the hope of Babylonian diaspora Jews eager to return to Judea. On the other hand, barrenness was a curse and a punishment (Gen. 30:1; Lev. 20:20–21; Jer. 22:30). For example, Rachel preferred death to childlessness since a woman's inability to conceive was a social and religious stigma (Gen. 16:2; 20:18; 30:2–3, 9). Abimelech and his wives were punished, though only temporarily, with barrenness (Gen. 20:17–18), and so was Michal, Saul's Daughter and David's wife (II Sam. 6:23). Although Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, and the Shunamite woman were all barren at first, God, who alone holds

the key to fertility, “opened their wombs” and the childless matriarchs became metaphors for consolation and comfort.

Both the Sumerian goddesses and the Daughter of Zion experience the destruction of their cities and have protective roles in relation to the city they represent. They share a concern with the well-being of the most vulnerable: women, children, and the infirm. Both confront male deities and protest the violence against their cities. While the Sumerian goddesses describes the destruction as bodily trauma and advocate for both their cities and themselves, the "advocacy" of the Daughter of Zion is railing against God for the destruction He already wrought. The Daughter of Zion’s personal connection to the city of Jerusalem makes it impossible for her to accept complacently the damage to innocent victims allowed by God: *The precious children of Zion . . . The tongue of the suckling cleaves to its palate for thirst. Little children beg for bread; None give them a morsel. . . . With their own hands, tenderhearted women have cooked their children; Such became their fare, in the disaster of my poor people* (Lam. 4:1-10).

In the Sumerian Laments, the patron-gods of the city, following the formal decision of the divine assembly, were forced to abandon their city and temple. In some cases, the patron gods and goddesses attempted to rescue their city from destruction by pleading, screaming and shedding tears before the divine council, but their plea was rejected: “When they (=the great gods) had commanded the utter destruction of my city; When they had commanded the utter destruction of Ur; When they had ordered that its people be killed – On that day, I (=the patron goddess) did not forsake my city, I did not neglect my land. I shed my tears before An, I myself made supplication before Enlil: ‘Let not my city be destroyed!’ I said to them. ‘Let not Ur be destroyed!’ I said to them. ‘Let not its people perish!” I said to them. But An would not change that word, Enlil would not soothe my heart with that: “It is good; so be it” (Ur Lament 140-151).

The goddess lamented her city and shrine: “Mother Ningal (=Ur’s patron goddess) kept away from her city. . . the woman bitterly utters the wailing for her devastated house; The princess bitterly cries over her devastated shrine, Ur: ‘. . . My daughters and sons have been carried off in ships;’ ‘Alas, my men!’ I shall cry . . . My young men, in a desert they know not, wear filthy

garments . . . Woe is me! My city that ceased to exist, I am no longer its lady!" (Ur Lament 252–286).

While the destruction itself was assigned to the great, fearsome gods, the compassion, the attempts to defend the city and the final return were ascribed to the accessible and benevolent patron gods of the city.[12]

The Sumerian Laments form a triangle: great gods/patron gods/people; Lamentations forms a different triangle: The God of Israel/ foreign nations/ God's people. These triangles reflect two different arenas, each dealing in its own way with Divine cruelty.

The Sumerian City Laments suggest several different explanations for the destruction. In one passage, it states that the destruction is inexplicable since the heart of the chief god Enlil is "darkened": "Father Enlil, the one who advises with just words, the wise words of the Land […] your inimical judgment […] look into your darkened heart, terrifying like waves. O Father Enlil, the fate that you have decreed cannot be explained" (Sumer and Ur Lament 456–458).

Another passage presents the Sumerian belief that the end of a reign comes when its appointed duration expires. The existence of this "appointed time" of duration is a cosmic law which cannot be changed or resisted: "The judgment uttered by the assembly cannot be turned back, the word spoken by An and Enlil knows no overturning. Ur was indeed given kingship; but it was not given an eternal reign… who has ever seen a reign of kingship that would take precedence (forever)? The reign of its kingship has been long indeed, but had to exhaust itself" (Uruk Lament 364–369).

Yet another explanation suggests that the gods decided to destroy the city and kill its inhabitants in order to balance the uncontrolled multiplying of humankind: "Mortal man multiplied to become as numerous as the gods. When together […] had achieved a momentous decision, the […] of the gods […] Enki and Ninki determined the consensus… Enul and Ninul assigned the fate" (Uruk Lament 4–5). All these explanations share the basic assumption that the destruction is unrelated to, and unaffected by, human deeds.

The explanation given in Lamentations uses a basic mechanism of divine retribution, and the destruction of the city is related to human deeds: *Jerusalem has grievously sinned; therefore she became despised* (Lam. 1:8).[13]

LAMENTATIONS

The Bible generally describes the divine activities in the realm of history (or perhaps, historiography), while other Ancient Near East literature seems to focus on the actions of the gods in the sphere of nature.[14] In Lamentations, it is the terrestrial rather than heavenly or cosmic realms of the destruction, as devastating as it was. The desolation is the consequence of destruction and exile, not of an overall cosmic collapse: *Her enemies are now the masters her foes are at ease… her infants have gone into captivity before the enemy* (Lam. 1:5).

The monotheistic world of Lamentations does combine some aspects of God's role in the sphere of nature and history. The second chapter in Lamentations, for instance, depicts a cruel picture of the Israelite deity as the exclusive destroyer of Jerusalem, who demolished the city and kills his people by his own hands:

> *How has the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger! He cast down from heaven to earth the majesty of Israel, and did not remember his footstool in the day of his wrath. The Lord has laid waste without pity all the habitations of Jacob, he has destroyed in his wrath the strongholds of the daughter of Judah; He has brought low in dishonor the kingdom and its leaders. He has cut down in fierce anger all the might of Israel; he has drawn back their (=Israel's) right hand from before the enemy, and he burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, consuming on all sides. He has bent his bow like an enemy, (held) the sword's haft in his right hand like an adversary…and slew all who were delighted to the eye. In the tabernacle of the daughter of Zion he poured out his wrath like fire. The Lord was as an enemy, he has laid waste Israel, he has laid waste all her citadels, destroyed his strongholds, and has increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and moaning* (Lam. 2:1–5).

The divine action in Lamentations 2 is so dominant that it overshadows any potential human involvement. Any prospective restoration will be possible only when the nation recognizes its guilt: *Let us search and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord. Let us lift up our heart with our hands to God in heaven. We have transgressed and rebelled, and you have not forgiven* (Lam. 3:40–42)

CONCLUSION

In sum, both the Sumerian and the biblical texts mourn the ruin of a major city and its shrines by the hand of a deity or divine council. The devastation is typically carried out by an invading army (portrayed as a storm at times); the goddess of the city is a major figure who challenges the council's decision and mourns the fate of the city; and the laments with praise of the gods who return and reestablish their temples. The differences, however are God's relationship with a predominately monotheistic Israel. In the Sumerian City Laments, the cosmic deities focus on the patron gods, with few references to humans. In Lamentations, God's only concern is the bring His people back to him, perhaps using "tough love": *You shall be My people, And I will be your God* (Jer. 30:22).

Lamentations ends with a plea of reconciliation: *But You, O Lord, are enthroned forever, Your throne endures through the ages. Why have you forgotten us utterly, forsaken us for all time? Take us back, O Lord, to Yourself, and let us come back;*[15] *Renew our days as of old! For truly, You have rejected us, bitterly raged against us. Take us back, O Lord, to Yourself, and let us come back; Renew our days as of old!* (Lam. 5: 19-22).

Although Jerusalem was just one of many capital cities destroyed by the Babylonians, its destruction triggered significant changes in the intellectual, cultural, religious and political identities of the people associated with the city. Struggling to come to grips with the implications of this disaster, Ezekiel 40-48 reports a vision of a new Jerusalem and a new Temple, created by God. After the Persians defeated the Babylonians in the late sixth century BCE, the descendants of the people who had been deported to Babylonia were permitted to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple, but not on the scale envisioned in Ezekiel. The Second Temple was rebuilt under Herod (c. 20 BCE) before being destroyed by Titus and the Romans in 70 CE. Israel survived that disaster, as it has several since (e.g. October 1973; October 2023).

The bottom line is that the Sumerian Laments don't have punishment for sin as a possible reason for the destruction but rather all reasons that are outside of human action (fate). Lamentations emphasizes a faith-based explanation found throughout the Bible: If Israel follows God's commandment *I the*

Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage: You shall have no other gods besides Me (Ex. 20: 2-3), then *You shall be My people, And I will be your God* (Jer. 30: 22). A quid-pro-quo.

NOTES

1. For a recent review of the cCity lLament see: Samet, N. 2014. *The Lamentation Over the Destruction of Ur*. Eisenbrauns. Pp. 1−31. According to Samet, five laments of this type have been identified and deciphered, each devoted to the destruction of a different city: the Ur Lament; the Sumer and Ur Lament; the Uruk Lament; the Eridu Lament; and the Nippur Lament. The city of Uruk is probably the Biblical Erech (Gen. 10:10). See also Samet, N. 2012. "Sumerian City Laments and the Book of Lamentations: Toward a Comparative Theological Study". Shnaton: An Annual for Biblical and Near Eastern Studies. Vol 21. P. 109.; Ziegler, Yael. *Lamentations: Faith in a Turbulent World.* 2021. Maggid Press.; Ziegler, Yael. *Eikha*: *The Book of Lamentations*. Yeshivat Har Etzion. Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (Vbm).

2. The book of Lamentations has been dated to the second half of the sixth century BCE, the year of the fall of Jerusalem. Lamentations is chanted in its entirety on *Tisha b'Av*, the commemoration of the destruction of the First and Second Temples.

3. Others include Isaiah, Psalms, Jeremiah.

4. But as Yael Ziegler points out, while the word *badad* conveys the city's loneliness, a positive biblical usage of the word implies Israel's singularity or security. Balaam prophetically proclaims that Israel is a "people that dwells alone (*am le-vadad yishkon*) and is not reckoned among the nations" (Num. 23: 9), emphasizing Israel's uniqueness. Other verses illustrate the manner in which isolation (using the word *badad*) can be positive, guaranteeing Israel's safety (e.g. Deut. 33:28; Psa. 4:9). Ziegler, Yael. *Eikha*: *The Book of Lamentations*. Yeshivat Har Etzion. Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (Vbm).

5. Elsewhere in Tanakh, the word *badad* describes a leper (Lev 13: 46), a social outcast (Jer. 15:17), and a destroyed city (Isa. 27: 10).

6. The "widow" portrayal in Lamentations could represent a loose woman whose "lovers have abandoned her," a shift of imagery which implicates her in her own suffering: *Bitterly she weeps in the night, her cheek wet with tears. There is none to comfort her of all her friends. All her lovers have betrayed her; They have become her foes* (Lam. 1:2). Since she represents the nation, Judah's adulterous pursuit of other gods led to its downfall.

7. Hillers, D.R. 1972. *The Anchor Bible: Lamentations.* Doubleday & Company.

8. Berlin notes also that Lamentations is not specific about details, and completely leaves Babylonia out of the story. The suffering portrayed in the Book of Lamentation is felt by all genders, ages and classes, and the destruction Jerusalem destroys the hierarchy that give these categories meaning. Berlin, Op. Cit P. 10.

9. Samet, N. "Sumerian City Laments and the Book of Lamentations: Toward a Comparative Theological Study," *Shnaton: An Annual for Biblical and Near Eastern Studies* 21 (2012), pp. 91–110.

10. The Sumerian Laments do recognize human enemies as well, referred to as the "agents of the destruction, summoned by Enlil". In many cases, they are also identified with another entity – the "divine storm" which destroys the city.

11. In the epic Atrahasis, Enki proposes a solution to the problem of human overpopulation: create new human creatures who will not be as fertile. From now on, it is declared, there will be women who cannot bear children, demons who will snatch infants away and cause miscarriages, and women consecrated to the gods who will have to remain virgins.

12. A special exception to this description seems to be the Nippur Lament, where the city's patron god, Enlil, is also the chief of the divine council.

13, Greenstein, E. L. 2004. The *Wrath at God in the Book of Lamentations. The Problem of Evil and Its Symbols in Jewish and Christian Tradition*. G. Reventlow and Y. Hoffman Eds. A&C Black. Pp. 31–42.

14. See, e.g., Kaufman, Yehezkel. 1936. *History of the Religion of Israel*, Tel Aviv 1936. Vol. 1. Pp. 221–558.

15. According to Isaiah, Cyrus was destined to subdue all nations before him. In return for this favor Cyrus would restore the Jewish exiles to their native land: "'*It was I who roused him* [i.e., Cyrus] *for victory and who level all roads for him. He shall rebuild My city and let My exiled people go without price and without payment' said the Lord of Hosts* (Isa. 45: 13). The Cyrus Cylinder records his conquest of the city of Babylon in 539 BCE, and his proclamation that cults and temples should be restored, their personnel allowed to return from Babylon to their home cities. When the Cylinder was discovered in the late nineteenth century, scholars realized that the text substantiated the Biblical account.

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