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# Nach Yommi

COMPANION

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*Volume II:*

**Neviim Achronim - Later Prophets**

*Section B:*

**Yirmiya - Jeremiah**

# Jeremiah: Not a Bullfrog

Despite what the song may say, Jeremiah was NOT a bullfrog.

The prophet Yirmiyahu was one of the three “major prophets” of the Bible, the other two being Yeshayahu (Isaiah) and Yechezkel (Ezekiel). They are “major” because their Books are large, as opposed to the “minor” prophets, whose Books are small. (The “minor” prophets’ books are so small that they are combined into a single volume, but we’ll come to that in due time.)

Yirmiyahu spent his career as a prophet warning the people to get off the path of destruction they were on. (They didn’t listen.) He lived a particularly harsh life, including derision, imprisonment, and being tossed in a pit and left to die. (He was rescued.) The Book ends with the invasion of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the destruction of the Temple. Yes, there are some uplifting Messianic prophecies in the Book, but for the most part it lacks the consolation found in Isaiah.

Yirmiyahu prophesied during the reigns of kings Yoshiyahu, Yehoachaz, Yehoyakim, Yehoyachin and Tzidkiyahu; his career lasted forty years. He was the teacher of the prophet Baruch and a contemporary of the prophetess Chulda.

Aside from the Book that bears his name, Yirmiyahu also wrote Melachim (Kings) and Eicha (Lamentations). Like the Book of Jeremiah, Melachim ends with the siege of Jerusalem and the Temple. Eicha, of course, is the mourning after Jerusalem was destroyed and is the book read on Tisha B’Av, the day that commemorates the destruction of the Temple.

## Chapter 1

### Almond Branches and Boiling Cauldrons

These are the words of rebuke from Jeremiah (Yirmiyahu) who was a Kohein (priest) and who was descended from Joshua and Rachav (see Talmud Megilla 14b). G-d appeared to Jeremiah in the days of King Yoshiyahu (Josiah) of Judah and he prophesied through the reign of King Tzidkiyahu, until the Jews were exiled in the month of Av.

G-d said to Jeremiah, “I knew you even before you were formed in your mother’s womb; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” (Rashi refers to the Seder Olam, which says that G-d showed Adam every generation and its prophets.) Jeremiah balked. “I don’t know how to speak - I’m only a youth!” (Jeremiah is frequently associated with Moses; this is one way in which they were similar, as Moses had a similar hesitation.) G-d replied, “Don’t say that you’re just a youth. Go where I send you and say what I tell you; don’t fear because I will protect you.”

G-d reached out and placed His words in Jeremiah’s mouth. He said, “Behold, I have appointed you over nations, to destroy and to build.” G-d then showed Jeremiah a vision. He asked Jeremiah what he saw; it was the

branch of an almond tree. G-d said, "Just as the almond branch blossoms quickly, I will quickly perform the things I tell you." Next, G-d showed Jeremiah the vision of a bubbling pot facing north. G-d said, "The troubles to befall the nation will come from the north," meaning Babylonia, which was north of Israel. "They will attack Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah and I will judge the people for their evil, since they turned away and worshipped idols."

Jeremiah was instructed to gird himself, like a warrior, and to speak to the people. He was not to let the people discourage him. G-d made Jeremiah like an invincible fortress, with iron pillars and copper walls, against the kings of Judah, the officers and the people. "They will fight against you," G-d said, "but they will not defeat you because I am on your side."

## Chapter 2

### Turning to Egypt: Not the Best Idea

G-d told Jeremiah to go out into Jerusalem and tell them that He is willing to accept their repentance, as He recalls how the nation followed Him into the wilderness following the Exodus from Egypt. Israel is holy to G-d, like the new produce before the Omer is brought; anyone who "eats" them will be considered guilty.

Jeremiah tells Israel to listen to G-d. Why did their ancestors distance themselves from Him and pursue idols? They didn't ask where G-d was, even though He brought them out of Egypt, through the desert and into a good land. Instead, they contaminated the land with idolatry. The Kohanim (priests), who served in the Temple, did not object to the people pursuing idols. Torah scholars did not live up to what they learned. The leaders rebelled and the prophets quoted Baal, a popular idol of the time. This is why G-d has become at odds with the nation.

Go to the Kitiyim (Cyprus) and Kedar (presumably the Arabian Peninsula) and see whether any nation ever traded in their "gods" - even though those "gods" are no gods at all! But Israel exchanged the real G-d for non-gods! This is two sins: first, turning away from G-d, who is like a spring of living water; second, turning to idols, who are like cracked wells that can't even hold water.

Is Israel a slave to be bought and sold between different owners? (No.) Why are they now prey? Young lions, referring to the kings of the various nations, fight over them, conquering their lands. The Jews turned to the Egyptians for help, but the Egyptians will also trouble them. That's what you get for forsaking G-d. You want to drink from the Nile, where they drowned your children? You'll end drinking from the Euphrates when you're exiled to Assyria!

The people's own sins will bring evil upon them. They will learn the hard way what it is to turn one's back on G-d. G-d removed the Jews from Egyptian slavery and they promised to keep the Torah, but on every hilltop they're worshipping idols! (Verse 20 is a kri/k'siv, in which the word is spelled and pronounced two different ways. The text is read "lo e'evor," I will not sin, but it is written "lo e'evod" - I will not serve, referring to idols.)

G-d says, referring to the Jews, that He planted good vines, but they grew wild. (The word “shoreik” in verse 21, referring to the good vine, has a numerical value of 606. All mankind has an obligation to keep the seven universal laws; when the Jews received the Torah, they received an additional 606 commandments.)

Even if the people would scrub themselves with soap, they would be stained by their sins. How can they deny it? They’re like a young camel that loves to wander, or a wild donkey that’s used to the wilderness; who can tame them? If someone tries, they will not succeed. Only when they have become full of their sins will they be able to be overcome.

Stop wandering like those wild animals or you’ll end up barefoot and thirsty in exile! People gave up on G-d because they saw sinners prospering and decided to follow them. They are embarrassed, like a thief is ashamed when he gets found out. They considered idols of wood and stone to be their gods, and when things go bad, they ask the real G-d to save them! Where have the idols gone? Let them do it! Don’t antagonize G-d by claiming you didn’t sin! He punished them, but they refused to correct their ways - they even destroyed the prophets who brought them G-d’s word! (Talk about shooting the messenger!)

Jeremiah showed the people the jar of manna that was left over from the time of Moses. He said, “See the word of G-d! It wasn’t a desert to your ancestors, because G-d brought them food daily! Why turn your backs on Him?” Would a young bride forget her jewelry? How can the Jewish people forget the Torah, which was G-d’s “wedding present” to them?

They “dress up” like adulterers do, looking for the most evil activities. The blood of the innocent is on their clothes; their victims caused them no harm, they just tried to get the sinners to change their ways! The sinners said, “Who, me? I’m innocent!” but G-d disagrees.

How degrading to turn to Egypt for help, rather than to G-d! Egypt will turn on you the same way Assyria did (see II Kings 16-17). Just as you departed from the king of Assyria in tears (perhaps referring to II Kings 18), you will leave the king of Egypt in sorrow. G-d hates those tyrants to whom the nation has turned and the people will not be successful through such unions.

## Chapter 3

### Your Cheating Heart

Jeremiah says that if a man divorces his wife and she marries another, he may not take her back again after that. But the Jews “cheated on” G-d with many idols and He is still willing to take them back! Look around - is there any place they didn’t cheat on G-d? They sat by the side of the road, eagerly waiting for idolators to come! They defiled the land and rain was withheld, but they refused to be corrected. Why don’t they turn back to G-d and call Him “Father” again? If they would only do that, His anger would pass. Instead, they squeeze in as much evil as they are able.

G-d said to Jeremiah during the reign of King Yoshiyahu, "Look at how the Jews have relapsed. They worship idols on every hill and under every tree. My prophets told them to repent, but so far they haven't listened. The Kingdom of Judah saw the mistakes made by the northern Kingdom of Israel and they walked into the same trap! Because of their cheating, I sent Israel into exile, divorcing them. But now Judah is cheating on Me! They are contaminating the land with their idolatry! Israel was better than Judah - at least they didn't have the benefit of someone else's example as a warning!"

G-d then told Jeremiah to bring back exiles from the Ten Tribes (see Talmud Megilla 14b). Jeremiah told them to return and that G-d would not be angry forever. All they had to do was acknowledge their sins, for rebelling against G-d. Return, the prophet tells them, and G-d will accept them. He will give the people leaders who will direct them according to His will and who will feed them knowledge and understanding. When the people are once again prosperous in the land, they will no longer need to go to battle bearing the Ark of the Covenant as in the old days; war will be a thing of the past.

Jerusalem will be considered the throne of G-d by all nations, who will gather there to serve Him. Judah and Israel will be reunited into one nation again. G-d gave them a desirable land and He asks that they call Him their Father again and follow Him.

The nation betrayed G-d like a faithless wife. A voice will be heard - the Jews crying that they forgot G-d. Return, Jeremiah says, and G-d will cure them of their backsliding tendencies. (That's how repentance works; if we start it, G-d helps us finish it.) The people will realize that they turned to idols in vain - only G-d can save them. The idolatry of generations has left its toll on the nation; they are totally disgraced because they sinned against G-d for so long.

## Chapter 4

### **They Just Don't Get It**

G-d says that if the Jews return to Him, He will accept them and if they remove their idols, they will not be exiled. When they swear in G-d's Name (as opposed to that of idols), then they will be swearing in truth and righteousness. The other nations will praise Israel when they are faithful to G-d.

G-d told the nation to learn from farmers, who plow the soil to keep thorns from growing where they wish to plant. The Jews are advised to "circumcise" their hearts, removing those impediments to clinging to G-d. If they do not do so, G-d's anger will ultimately come upon them because of their sins. It will be announced throughout the kingdom of Judah to flee before the invading forces, Babylonia attacking from the north.

Nebuchadnezzar is like a lion, whom none can resist. He has sprung upon the people to lay waste their cities. The Jews will mourn because they brought the anger of G-d upon themselves. On that day, the heart of the king and his officers will fall, while the priests and false prophets of the idols will be amazed.

Jeremiah says that G-d has surely misled the Jews by promising them peace because the sword has come upon them. (The Radak explains that it was the false prophets of the idols who promised peace. Since G-d never stopped them from doing so, the people took that as His tacit consent.) When the enemy invades, it will be said of the Jews that a wind blew away the streams of water, leaving a desert. A stronger wind (or spirit) will come to Israel; Jeremiah says he will contend with the false prophets of the idols. The enemy will approach swiftly. Jeremiah says that this is not the time for lip service - real repentance is necessary: "Remove the evil from your hearts and be saved!"

The voice of the prophets calls from the locations of idolatry in Dan and Mount Ephraim (home of Yeravam's golden calf in I Kings 12 and Micha's idol in Judges 17-18, respectively). The voice warns of the oncoming siege. The attackers will surround Jerusalem like watchmen surround a field. What caused this? The Jews' rebelling against G-d. Jeremiah is so overwrought that it causes him actual physical pain. It's just one destruction after another, until the whole land has been overrun, palaces falling as easily as tents. How long must we see the flags and hear the shofars of war? The people are foolish and they don't recognize G-d, like children who just don't understand. But when it's time to do evil, then they're smart!

In a vision, Jeremiah sees the Earth, desolate and uninhabited, as at the beginning of Creation. The skies were dark, representing the troubles to come, and the mountains shook, representing the destruction that would befall kings. The land was emptied of its people; even the birds had fled. The fields had become deserts and the cities were destroyed, all because of G-d's anger. G-d says that the land will become a wasteland, but He will not allow it to become completely empty; there will always be some who remain. The Earth will mourn and the skies will go dark because of what will happen; G-d has spoken and He will not change His mind.

The sound of oncoming soldiers will make the inhabitants of the cities flee until every city is deserted. Jeremiah uses the analogy of a promiscuous woman: "Once you're shamed, what's the point of adorning yourself with jewelry and make-up? You're dressing up for lovers that hate you." Instead, the nation will be like a woman in labor with her first child, unused to such pains. They will cry out that they are weak because of those who seek to destroy them.

## Chapter 5

### Wyld Stallyns

Jeremiah says: Go walk through the streets of Jerusalem and see whether you can find a righteous man there. If you do, G-d will forgive the nation. (This verse is puzzling, as surely there were some righteous people in Jerusalem! One explanation is that there were no righteous people "in the streets" - that is, things were so bad, they all covered indoors. Another explanation is that "man" here is meant like it's used in Avos 2:6 and elsewhere, meaning a take-charge person. There were righteous people, but they didn't step forward and chastise the majority for their behavior.) The people swear in the names of their idols; if you hear someone swear in the name of G-d, he's trying to deceive you into thinking he's righteous.

G-d pays heed to those who are faithful to Him, so why do so many turn on Him? He punishes them, but they refuse to listen to Him. Jeremiah says that the people simply lack understanding and he goes to their leaders to convince them to lead the people back on the proper path. Unfortunately, they paid him no mind. Because of this, a "lion" (Nebuchadnezzar) will strike them, a "wolf" (the Medes) will pillage them and a "leopard" (Greece) will attack their cities. Anyone who ventures out will be torn apart (Rashi says by Edom, which is Rome) because of their sins.

The people do not deserve to be forgiven. They turned on G-d and followed non-gods. He gave them everything, but they cheated on Him. They were adulterous with one another's wives, like wild stallions. How can G-d overlook such behavior? (As in the previous chapter, G-d says that He will destroy, but not completely.) The people denied G-d. They figured He doesn't care what we do and there won't be any payback; they disregard the words of the prophets. What G-d says through His prophets will, in fact, happen to such people. Therefore, G-d put His Word in Jeremiah's mouth like flame, to consume people like wood. A nation is coming from the distance, whose language the Jewish nation doesn't know. (This is bad because of the inability to communicate and negotiate.) They are crack shots with a bow and arrow - every shot is a kill. They will eat the harvest, kill the children, capture the herds and flocks, and destroy the vineyards and orchards. They will ruin the cities with their swords.

G-d says that, despite all this, He will not allow the Jewish people to be eradicated. If you ask why He allowed all this evil to come upon us, the answer is: Just as they served foreign "gods," now let them serve foreign nations! Let the fools finally see, hear and understand Who G-d is. He made the sand a boundary for the ocean - no matter how hard the waves churn, they cannot pass it. If the sea cannot hope to revolt against G-d's will, how can a rebellious nation expect to do so? G-d gives them rain in its proper time to ensure the harvest schedule, and still they refuse Him! Their sins brought about these troubles.

There are evil people in the nation, who set ambushes for others. They are rich with possessions obtained illicitly and they don't turn down any opportunity to sin. They don't stick up for orphans or poor people, who need their help. How can G-d overlook this? It's mind-boggling that prophets lie, telling the people that there will be peace, and the priests rule through them. And the people like this arrangement! If that's how things are now, imagine what they will be like later.

## Chapter 6

### Silver Fillings

The Benjaminites are told to gather, to guard their cities, and the city of Tekoa is told to sound the shofar to warn of the impending invasion. (The choice of the city of Tekoa is a play on "tekiah," the sound a shofar makes.) G-d says that the delicate people have been destroyed. Shepherds and their flocks - Rashi says referring to kings and their armies - will each come to feed off of a city they have surrounded. They are all prepared to battle Israel, both noon and night. G-d enables them to cut down the trees in order to build their attack



positions against Jerusalem, whose sins have caused this. Evil pours forth from Jerusalem like water from a well. Correct yourselves, they are warned, before it's too late! They will be picked clean, like a vineyard. The enemy will pass over them a second time, to make sure they haven't missed anything.

Jeremiah asks, "Who can I warn that will listen? The people act as if their ears are clogged! They don't want to hear G-d's word!" This makes G-d even angrier and He is unwilling to hold back forever. He will pour His wrath out (through the invading armies) on men and women, old and young. Their houses, fields and wives will be taken away and given to others because they are all corrupt, from the smallest of them to the greatest. The false prophets eased their minds by promising them peace, but it was a lie. These charlatans should be ashamed for doing this, but they're not. The false prophets themselves will perish in the siege.

G-d says: Stand at the crossroads and see which is the good path. If the people would do this, they'd finally have peace of mind, but they refuse. G-d places guardians over the people, sounding shofars, but they don't listen. Therefore, the nations of the world are called to attack; they will know the evil that has been in Jerusalem. The Earth is a witness that G-d brings this destruction for violating His Torah.

G-d doesn't need fancy spices, imported from foreign lands to be offered up as incense. The Jews' sacrifices are unacceptable to Him. Therefore, G-d will place stumbling blocks before the nation. Both fathers and sons, neighbors and friends will trip over them.

A nation is coming from the north; they have no mercy. They roar frighteningly, like the ocean. They are armed and mounted for war. Just hearing this makes the people weak. Don't go on the road or in the field because the enemy is there! Instead, put on the ashes and sackcloth of mourning because of the invaders.

G-d tells Jeremiah that He has made him the strength of the people. They go off in all different directions, none of them good. G-d refines Jeremiah while destroying the wicked, like a smith destroys lead while refining silver. The people are like "refuse silver," also called "reprobate" - the kind used in fillings rather than in jewelry. No matter how hard you try, it can't be refined.

## Chapter 7

### Who is the "Queen of Heaven?"

G-d told Jeremiah to position himself in front of the main entrance to the Temple. Jeremiah was to proclaim to those who came to the Temple that they should heed G-d's word. If they would improve themselves, G-d would allow them to continue to inhabit the land and have the Temple. The people were encouraged to ignore the false prophets who say that G-d would never allow His Temple to be destroyed. They must improve themselves by being proactive in mitzvos like judging righteously and aiding the weak and needy. Bloodshed and idolatry must stop. If they do this, G-d will let them live in the land forever.



Listening to the false prophets does no good. Do you think people can steal, kill, commit adultery and worship idols, then just go to the Temple and everything will be overlooked? Not so! Don't expect to treat the House of G-d like a cave where wild people gather. (I assume they gather to party, or perhaps to plot their evil. Jeremiah doesn't specify.)

If you think Jerusalem is impenetrable because of the Temple, remember Shiloh, where the Mishkan (Tabernacle) stood. G-d allowed it to be destroyed because of the people's sins. And now, since the people didn't learn their lesson from the destruction that took place there, G-d will allow Jerusalem and the Temple to be destroyed as well. G-d will allow the people to be exiled as He did with the Ten Tribes of the Northern Kingdom.

G-d tells Jeremiah not to pray for the people, because He won't listen. How can Jeremiah even think to pray for the people; doesn't he see what they're doing? They're preparing offerings for false "gods!" (One of them is referred to as "The Queen of Heaven." This is probably a star or the planet Venus, which was identified with the Assyrian goddess Ishtar.) Do these idolatrous people think they're making trouble for G-d? Really, they're making trouble for themselves because, ultimately, they will come to regret their actions!

G-d says that His anger will come upon people, animals, trees and crops - it will burn and not be extinguished. G-d tells the people that they might as well take their burnt offerings (which are given up completely to G-d) and turn them into peace offerings (which are eaten by their owners). Since G-d won't accept their sacrifices anyway, they might as well enjoy the meat! People weren't commanded to give sacrifices, they were commanded to obey G-d. The former without the latter is meaningless. Since the people refused to listen to G-d, they were moving backwards, not forwards.

Ever since they left Egypt, G-d continuously sent the people prophets with His message, but they didn't listen and they became increasingly more obstinate. It's reached the point that G-d tells Jeremiah up front that the people simply won't listen to him. Jeremiah is to tell the people that they are the nation that wouldn't listen to G-d or allow themselves to be corrected. They don't have truth in their mouths, and certainly not in their hearts! Tear out your hair in grief because G-d has rejected this generation! The people of Judah have polluted the Temple with idolatry and they built altars to pass their children through fire - this is the service of the idol Molech; G-d hates the practice!

Days are coming, G-d says, when the Valley of Tofes will be called "The Valley of Slaughter" because of all the people who will be killed there; they will also be buried there because they will run out of grave space in the usual places. The carcasses of the fallen will be food for the animals and birds, with no one to scare the scavengers away. The sound of rejoicing will cease to be heard in Judah and Jerusalem - neither bride nor groom - because the land will be desolate.

## Chapter 8

### **Apochryphal Proof**

When G-d makes the wicked pay, they will exhume the bones of the kings, idolatrous priests and false prophets in order to make them pay posthumously. Their bones will be spread out under the heavenly bodies that they worshipped, never to be re-interred. (The fulfillment of this prophecy is not found in Tanach, but it is mentioned in the Apochryphal book of Baruch, chapter 2 verse 24-25: "But we would listen to Your voice, to serve the king of Babylon, therefore You have fulfilled that which You said through Your servants the prophets, that the bones of our kings, and the bones of our fathers, would be removed from their resting places. They are cast out to the heat of the day to the frost of the night...")

Death will be better than life to those Baal-worshippers who survive the death of their co-religionists. But should they only fall and not rise? If they repent, G-d will return to them. Why do the people of Jerusalem keep relapsing into their bad ways, refusing to repent sincerely? They don't speak properly to one another and they do not regret the evil they do. They're as enthusiastic in their evil as a horse rushing into battle. Birds can tell when it's time to migrate, but these people can't seem to remember to listen to G-d! They consider themselves knowledgeable in Torah, but they're deluded. They will be ashamed when it becomes apparent that they have rejected G-d's word. They will lose their wives and their property to others because everyone, great and small, deals deceitfully. The false prophets comfort the people with baseless reassurances of peace; they should be shamed because of their actions. Since they were not ashamed, they will be among the fallen, utterly destroyed.

Why is everyone so complacent, as if everything's okay? Go up to the strongholds and mourn there, for the evil that comes from abandoning G-d. Instead of peace and healing, there will be terror. From Dan, the home of Yerahm's golden calf idol, there will come the horses of the invaders to devour the land and its inhabitants. Fiery snakes that cannot be charmed are coming to bite. (At this point Jeremiah swoons because of the harshness of the prophecy that is revealed through him.) Eventually the people will cry from distant lands, where they will be exiled. This is so unnecessary - G-d is right here! If they would just turn to Him, all this could be avoided! But they continue to antagonize Him. Summer has come and gone and Egypt still hasn't sent aid.

Jeremiah mourns that he is wounded because his people are wounded; is there no salve or doctor to heal them? If only his head were a vessel full of water and his eyes fountains of tears - he would cry day and night over the fate of his nation!

## Chapter 9

### **Slings and Arrows... Outrageous Misfortune**

Jeremiah wishes that he could live in an inn, far away from his people, so he wouldn't have to observe their sinful actions. Their tongues are like bows shooting words of falsehood as the arrows. They go from one sin

to the next, not recognizing G-d. Nobody can trust anybody else. They just tell lies all day and sin until they're exhausted. Because of their immersion in falsehoods, they have lost the ability to know G-d. Therefore, the nation must be refined (through suffering, just as silver is refined through fire).

They speak peacefully to each other while secretly laying traps for one another - how can G-d possibly let this go on? Jeremiah mourns for the destruction that is to come; not only will the habitations of people be destroyed, even the places where cattle graze will become desolate. Both birds and animals will be forced to relocate. Jerusalem will become a ruin, inhabited by jackals. Isn't anybody smart enough to understand why the land is being turned into a wilderness? Isn't there a prophet who has been told this by G-d? It's because the people ignored the Torah! Instead of following G-d, they pursued their desires and served idols. Therefore, G-d will serve them bitterness and poison. They will be scattered throughout the nations and pursued to the verge of extinction.

G-d says to call for mourners to raise a cry over the people, so mournful that their eyes will gush. (Jeremiah includes himself among the nation by saying "us" rather than "them.") A cry is heard from Jerusalem, "We are ruined! We are shamed! We have been exiled and our homes have been razed!"

Jeremiah addresses the women, telling them to teach their neighbors and daughters a song of mourning. Death has entered, not discriminating infants and young adults. People will fall like sheaves without anyone to pick them up.

G-d says that no one should boast of their strength, wisdom or wealth - none of these things will save him. The only thing of value is that a person recognizes G-d - and G-d likes righteousness and justice! Days are coming when G-d will punish the wicked, Jew and non-Jew alike. Egypt, Judah, Ammon, Moab and the rest - they're either literally uncircumcised or, in the case of Israel, they have uncircumcised hearts.

## Chapter 10

### **People are Ignorant (Happy Passover!)**

Jeremiah tells Israel to listen to what G-d has to say about them. Don't learn the ways of the other nations and don't turn to the stars in the sky, as the other nations do; they will come to regret it. Worshipping heavenly bodies is bad enough, and it leads to worshipping idols of wood and stone. A carpenter chops a tree and carves it, embellishing it with silver and gold and reinforcing it with nails. These idols have no more ability to speak or walk than the trees from which they were made. They can neither harm nor save.

There is nobody like G-d, Who is great and Who has real power. Who would not be in awe of G-d, Who deserves to be acknowledged as the real Ruler of the universe? The nations are foolish for serving idols that are simply lumps of wood plated in precious metals. There's a real G-d, Whose anger will make the ground shake.

Jeremiah instructs King Yehoyachin and the exiles to tell the Kasdim (Chaldeans) that their "gods" did not make Heaven and Earth, but they will perish from Heaven and Earth! (This verse is in Aramaic, the language of

Babylonia, because they were to deliver the message in the vernacular.) G-d made the Heavens and Earth with strength, wisdom and understanding. He made the clouds, the lightning and the wind. People are ignorant of what G-d knows and how He does what He does. The idols made by artisans can't do anything - they're not even alive! They're a lie and they will perish from the world. G-d, Who revealed Himself to Israel, created everything and rules over myriads.

Next, Jeremiah tells the people under siege to gather their belongings. G-d says that He will greatly afflict the inhabitants of the land. Again, Jeremiah mourns for the destruction he sees; it's very painful for him, but he must endure it.

Jerusalem has been ruined and the inhabitants have been exiled. The kings, who were shepherds of the people, did not seek G-d with the result that the people - their flocks - have gone astray. Word has come from the north that Nebuchadnezzar is on the move; he is coming to lay waste to Judah.

Jeremiah tells G-d that he understands that Nebuchadnezzar could not accomplish this if it were counter to G-d's plan. He acknowledges that the people deserve to be punished, but he asks that G-d temper his attribute of justice with that of mercy so the people will not be destroyed. Instead, he asks that G-d redirect some of His wrath to the nations that do not recognize Him and who have oppressed Israel over the years. (This last verse is said during the Passover seder, when we stand and open the door.)

## Chapter 11

### The Plot to Kill G-d's Prophet

G-d spoke to Jeremiah, saying that he should tell the people to listen to the words of their covenant with G-d. A person who will not heed the covenant will be cursed. When G-d took the nation out of the "iron crucible" of Egypt, the deal was that they serve Him, rather than the Egyptians. He would fulfill the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the Jews would inherit the land. (Jeremiah responded "Amen" that G-d would rightfully curse those who refuse to comply with the covenant.)

G-d continued that Jeremiah should announce throughout Judah and Jerusalem to keep covenant and observe the mitzvos of G-d. The ancestors were warned every day since leaving Egypt to listen to G-d, but they still refuse, each preferring to do as he pleases. G-d punished them for non-compliance, as He said He would (Deut. 28), but they didn't correct their behavior. It's a conspiracy among the people, to return to the sins of earlier generations and to serve idols. The nations of Judah and Israel broke the covenant with G-d, so He will bring inescapable evil upon them. They will cry out to Him, but He won't listen to them. When they're exiled, the people will call upon the idols they worshipped, as if that will do any good. (There was an idol for every city and the streets were full of altars to Baal.)

As in chapter 7, G-d instructs Jeremiah not to pray for the people because He will not listen. Why do the people even bother going to the Temple, seeing all the evil they plan and do? They even stopped circumcising their children, which is the sign of the covenant with G-d! G-d had compared the people to a good olive tree, laden

with fruit, but now the branches of this tree will be broken up and the leaves will be used as fuel for the fire. G-d planted this "tree," but now they must be punished for the evil they've done.

G-d informed Jeremiah of the evil that people were planning to do to him (they didn't care much for his criticism, even though it was intended to save them). He was like an animal about to be sacrificed and he had no idea! People from Jeremiah's hometown, the priestly city of Anasos, had planned to poison him, but G-d "tipped him off." G-d knows all the thoughts and deeds of a person, so it's not as if such a plot could be concealed from Him. Jeremiah just asked that he should live to see how G-d punished those who plotted to murder him. G-d announced regarding the plotters of Anasos that they would die by the sword and their children would starve. They would be punished more harshly than the rest of the nation in that none of them would survive.

## Chapter 12

### Why Do the Wicked Prosper?

Jeremiah says that he knows that G-d is by definition always right, but that he still engages in debate with Him so that he can better understand G-d's ways. He then asks G-d why the wicked are allowed to prosper. (Rashi says Jeremiah specifically asked why Nebuchadnezzar was allowed to achieve such greatness.) G-d plants these people, allowing them to flourish. Sometimes they give lip service to G-d, but they never serve Him for real. On the other hand, G-d knows that Jeremiah serves Him sincerely; He saved Jeremiah from the plotters of Anasos, whom He will punish. How long will the land be desolate?

G-d replies to Jeremiah's question that the sins of the people have caused the exile; they thought that G-d could not foresee their end. Just like a person who can't keep up with runners has no chance of keeping pace with horses, similarly if Jeremiah can't be safe in his hometown, what chance would he have in another land? The plotters were his own kinsmen and they tried to kill him! He must not trust them, even if they act civilly towards him.

G-d continues that He is "cutting His losses" - He's giving up on the Temple and the nation, allowing them to fall into enemy hands. The Jewish people treated G-d like a lion in the forest treats people passing through - they "roared" against Him, antagonizing Him. Are they a blood-stained bird of prey that other birds surround to attack, inviting the animals of the field to eat the remains? The generals of the Babylonian army (who are "shepherds" to their troops) will trample the land, turning it into a wasteland. Plunderers come to pillage the land, which has been laid waste from end to end by Nebuchadnezzar, acting on G-d's behalf. The people plant wheat, but thorns come up instead. They cry out from their troubles, but G-d will not listen.

Finally, G-d says regarding the countries neighboring Israel that He will exile them, as well. After He does so, they, too, will eventually return to their land - but only if they learn a lesson from the Jews. They have to learn from the Jews to serve G-d, just as they previously taught the Jews to serve idols. If they don't, then that nation will be gone for good. (You'll notice that many of our ancient neighbors are gone, but look how much of the non-Jewish world now worships G-d, albeit differently than we do.)

## Chapter 13

### Jeremiah is Commanded Not to Do His Laundry

G-d told Jeremiah to go buy a linen belt and to wrap it around his loins (imagine the way a modern athletic supporter is worn). Jeremiah was not to wash it. The prophet did as he was instructed. G-d then told Jeremiah to take that sweaty garment to a place called Peras (possibly on the banks of the Euphrates, as Peras is also the name of that river) and to hide the belt in a small cave there. Again the prophet did as instructed. Finally, Jeremiah was directed to retrieve the belt. When he did, the prophet discovered that it had rotted and was worthless. At this time, G-d decided to reveal the meaning behind these strange commands. G-d said that just as the linen belt was destroyed, this is how He would destroy the arrogance of the nation of Judah and the ego of the residents of Jerusalem. These people, who continue to follow their desires, rather than G-d's word, and who serve idols, will be like the belt: no good for anything. And just as the belt is wrapped around the loins, this is how G-d caused the nation to cling to Him, but they rebelled.

G-d instructed Jeremiah to say the following in His Name: Every jug will be filled with wine. When the people say "We know that every jug is filled with wine," Jeremiah will reply that the jugs are a metaphor; all the people, the kings, the priests and prophets will be full of drunkenness. G-d will smash them against one another, breaking them like jugs.

The people were encouraged to repent before it was too late. If they do not listen, Jeremiah will cry because their arrogance has caused G-d's people to be exiled. Tell King Yehoyachin and his royal mother to sit on the ground like mourners, for their greatness has been brought low. The cities are sealed in fear of Nebuchadnezzar; the nation has been exiled peacefully (meaning either surrender or acceptance of the exile as payment for their sins).

Look north; where is the exiled flock? What can you say when G-d comes, after you welcomed foreign idols? Won't you feel pains like a woman in labor? If you think, "Why did this happen?" know that it's because of the magnitude of the nation's sins. Can a person change the color of his skin, or a leopard its spots? (This is where the saying comes from, folks!) That's how likely it is that this sinful nation will change their ways! They will be scattered like straw in the wind. This is payback, says G-d, for overlooking Him in favor of idols. G-d shames the nation by metaphorically "lifting the hem of their garment over their face." (The metaphor is apt because the cheating nation is compared to an adulterous spouse and this would have been a way of shaming a promiscuous woman.) G-d has seen their cheating on every hill and they will not be purified from it.

## Chapter 14

### The Impending Drought

G-d spoke to Jeremiah about the droughts that were to come. The people of Judah will mourn because their cities will be desolate; the cry of Jerusalem will go up. Important people will send their servants to go find

water, but they will find the pits dry and will return empty-handed. They will cover their heads in mourning over the lack of water and in shame for their inability to fulfill their task. The ground will be broken from the lack of rain; farmers will be ashamed. Deer in the fields will give birth, but have to leave their offspring unattended to search for grass. Donkeys will gasp for air, climbing hills to look for grass, unsuccessfully. (All this is written in the present tense in the text, even though Jeremiah was speaking of the future.)

If our sins testify against us, we ask G-d to act for the sake of His Name. Why should our Hope and Savior be a stranger to His people, like a traveler who goes someplace else to sleep? G-d is among us and we are called by His Name, so we pray that He will not abandon us. G-d says that the people love to stray. They did not hesitate to do so, so He turned His back on them. Now He will remember their sins and pay them back in kind.

Once again G-d tells Jeremiah not to pray for the people. He will not accept it if the people fast or offer sacrifices; He is going to destroy them with war, famine and disease. Jeremiah responds by quoting the "prophets" of the time, who tell the people that none of this will happen; instead, there will be peace. G-d responds that those "prophets" are lying. He did not send them - He didn't even speak to them! The false prophets who deny the war and famine will be the first to die in the war and famine! The people who listened to them will find themselves cast into the streets with no one to bury them. (Why should they be punished for listening to prophets? How should they know the prophets are false? The prophets said things that were clearly against the Torah. The people allowed themselves to be deceived because the false prophets said what they wanted to hear.)

Jeremiah was instructed to tell the people that his eyes will run with tears day and night without stopping because of the impending exile. If he goes in the fields, he will see people killed by the sword. In the city, he will see people killed by the famine. Prophets and priests have gone to a land not their own.

Why has G-d rejected His nation, afflicting them and allowing no cure? We pray for healing and peace, but all we get is evil and terror. We know that we have repeated the sins of our ancestors against G-d and we ask that He not condemn us - not because we deserve it, but for His own sake. We ask that He remember the covenant with the Forefathers and keep it with us. None of the idols of the nations can make it rain; only G-d can do that. We pray to Him, for it is He Who shuts the Heavens, holding back the rain.

## Chapter 15

### **Jeremiah Loses His Temper - at G-d!**

G-d told Jeremiah that even if He were beseeched by Moses and Samuel, both of whom prayed for the people of their generations, He would still send this nation into exile. After they are exiled, if the nation asks, "Where shall we go?" Jeremiah is to tell them, "Some to death from the disease, others to the sword, others to the famine, and the rest to captivity." (Each punishment mentioned is harsher than the preceding.) G-d will assign four "families" (meaning four types of punishment): the sword to kill, the dogs to drag the carcasses, and the birds and beasts to devour them. The nation will be a horror to the kingdoms of the world; all who hear about



it will tremble in fright that such a thing might also happen to them. This all happened because of the evil of King Menashe of Judah, who institutionalized and promoted idolatry among the people.

Who will have pity on Jerusalem, or cry for them? Who will go out of their way to ask about their welfare? They have forsaken G-d, so they will go backwards, away from Him. He has stopped Himself from punishing them many times, but no more. Now He passes His hand over them to destroy them. G-d winnows the nation like grain, to disperse them. The widows of the nation are to G-d more numerous than the sands of the shore. G-d brings Nebuchadnezzar to Jerusalem to rob her in broad daylight. The troops of the invaders come upon her suddenly. G-d has cut off Jerusalem, the hometown of seven evil kings (see Midrash Tanchuma on Vayeitzei, cited by Rashi). Jerusalem mourns; metaphorically, the sun sets while it is still day. The survivors will be handed over to the enemy.

Jeremiah now mourns the fact that he is considered a person of contention, in that his own people despise him. G-d assures Jeremiah that He will leave him over; Jeremiah's end, at least, will be good. The people will turn to him in the time of famine and war. Egypt (or possibly Israel) is strong like iron, but they cannot defeat Nebuchadnezzar, who is like iron plus copper. The wealth of the nation will be plundered because of their sins. The people will be given to their enemies in a foreign land because G-d's fire is ignited against them.

Jeremiah asks G-d to remember him and to avenge him against those who pursue him. He asks that G-d not delay in doing so, as Jeremiah has allowed himself to be disgraced for G-d. He originally relished the role of being G-d's prophet; he didn't engage in frivolous activities. Instead, he sat in seclusion, mourning for the destruction he was shown. Jeremiah asks why he must always know such constant pain, like a wound that never heals. He compared G-d to an inconsistent spring that cannot be relied upon for water. (This was not a good thing to say to G-d.) G-d replied that if Jeremiah repented for his criticism of Him (Whose ways we really can't know), then He would forgive him. Similarly, let Jeremiah try and take good people out of the evil people. Let them return to him, but he is not to return to them (i.e., to follow in their ways). G-d says He will make Jeremiah like a strong copper wall to the nation - make no mistake, the people will fight against him, but they will not defeat him, because G-d is on his side. G-d will see to it that Jeremiah is protected from those who wish him harm.

## Chapter 16

### The Unwed Prophet

G-d told Jeremiah that he was not to marry or have children\* because the children born in that place (presumably Anasos) and their parents were doomed to fall to sickness and famine, never to be mourned or buried. Jeremiah was also instructed not to go to a house or mourning for them, since G-d has withdrawn His peace and kindness from them. Great and small will die, unburied and unmourned. There will be no meal to console mourners. Likewise, Jeremiah was not to go to a wedding feast because G-d said He would cut off the sounds of rejoicing from that place. When Jeremiah tells the people these things, they will ask what they did to deserve it. He will reply that it is because they rejected G-d and His Torah in favor of idols.

This generation is even worse than their ancestors because they know better, yet each one follows his own desires. That's why G-d is exiling them to a foreign land where they will serve the nations that worship the idols they loved so much. The day is coming, G-d says, when people will no longer refer to Israel as the nation G-d took out of Egypt. Instead, they will be known as the nation G-d returned from exile, because He WILL return them to the land. He will send many "fishermen" and "hunters," referring to the invaders who will pursue the Jewish people. The sins of the nation are not hidden from G-d, Who sees everything. He will punish them for repeating the sins of their ancestors and for defiling the land with idols.

Jeremiah speaks to G-d and says that nations will come from the ends of the Earth, saying that they inherited lies from their ancestors; they will realize that a person cannot make a "god!" Therefore, they will know G-d's power and that He alone is G-d.

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\*It may seem strange that G-d commanded Jeremiah not to marry or have children, since doing so is a mitzvah. G-d occasionally suspended individual mitzvos to the prophets because of the needs of their missions. This is why Elijah was able to sacrifice on a private altar, outside the Temple, and the Judge Samson was able to marry non-Jewish women.

## Chapter 17

### **THIS Pen is Certainly Mightier Than Any Sword!**

The nation's sin is deeply ingrained, as if written by an iron pen with a diamond point. And where is it "written?" On the people's hearts and on the altars they used to serve idols. Their idols were as dear to them as their own children. Therefore, G-d has made Jerusalem "fair game" for plunder. They will be forced to release the land to make up for all the shemmitos (Sabbatical years) they did not observe, while they serve their enemies in a foreign land.

G-d says that cursed is a person who puts his trust in human beings (Rashi clarifies that this means to work the land during the Sabbatical years, when it is supposed to rest). This causes him to turn away from G-d, Who promised enough produce before shemittah to last for three years. Such a person will be cut off (presumably childless) like a tree standing alone. He will dwell in dry, salty land, not seeing good.

On the other hand, a person who trusts in G-d will be blessed and G-d will be his trust. (This verse is sung as the song "Baruch HaGever.") This person will be like a tree planted by the water, whose leaves will stay green despite any drought.

A person's heart is full of deceit. A person may appear to be good, but G-d can tell what's really going on inside. G-d examines everyone inside and out, and gives them what they truly deserve. Some people claim wealth that they have not truly earned; they will not live to enjoy it.

G-d's "throne" is exalted and He is the source of hope to the Jewish people. Anyone who turns his back on G-d will ultimately regret it. Jeremiah asks G-d to heal him from the insults and injuries he has suffered. People ask where G-d is; Jeremiah asks G-d to show them! Jeremiah wasn't eager to ask G-d to act; he preferred to seek mercy on the nation. Since he had to foretell disaster, Jeremiah hopes that G-d's words will not be a source of humiliation to him. Jeremiah asks that his pursuers, not he, be shamed and broken. Let them suffer repeated days of reckoning.

G-d tells Jeremiah to stand in the gate used by many people, which the kings of Judah would use to come and go. He was then to visit the other gates of Jerusalem. And what was Jeremiah to do there? He was to announce to the people not to carry on Shabbos (the Sabbath) - not to carry into Jerusalem, nor to carry out of their houses, nor to perform any other labors on Shabbos. This was commanded many generations earlier, but the people didn't listen and neither did Jeremiah's generation. G-d says that if the people listen and refrain from carrying on Shabbos, then the Davidic dynasty would thrive and the people of Judah could inhabit Jerusalem forever. People would come from all over - from all of Judah and Benjamin, and from the Negev, to offer sacrifices to G-d in the Temple. But if they don't listen and continue to violate Shabbos, G-d will light a fire in Jerusalem, consuming all the palaces without being extinguished.

## Chapter 18

### The Potter's Wheel

G-d spoke to Jeremiah and told him to go to the house of a certain potter. When he got there, Jeremiah found the potter working on his pottery wheel. The clay pot he was making got ruined, so he just made it over again. G-d said to Jeremiah, "Just as this potter did to his vessel, I can do to Israel. I can exile and destroy a nation and, when they repent, I can stop punishing them. I can establish a nation and if they do evil, I can stop benefitting them. So tell the people of Judah that I plan to punish them and that they should return from their evil ways." G-d gave them this opportunity, even though He already knew that they wouldn't even try to improve, preferring to indulge their desires.

G-d said to look among the nations to see if there was anything ever so shameful as a people choosing to reject a source of pure water (metaphorically referring to G-d Himself). The people have forgotten G-d and sacrifice to idols. They claimed that the path of Torah was full of obstacles, so they chose a new path that they hadn't known before. Their evil will cause the land to become desolate and everyone who sees it will shake their head. G-d will scatter them before their enemies and will not save them.

The people plotted against Jeremiah. They thought, "So what if we do him in? The Torah won't be lost and there are other prophets. In fact, they'll probably give us better prophecies than Jeremiah! Let's not even listen to him!" Jeremiah prayed to G-d to listen to him rather than to his detractors, who seek to destroy him. He asks G-d to remember that he originally prayed on their behalf, in an attempt to save them. Now that they tried to kill him, however, all bets are off - their children will fall to the famine and the sword and their wives

will be widows. A great cry will be heard from their houses because G-d will bring the enemy upon them. G-d knows all about their plot and Jeremiah asks that He not overlook it. He prays that his enemies fall at the time of G-d's wrath.

## Chapter 19

### More Pottery

G-d told Jeremiah to buy a jug from a potter (specifically a clay jug, as opposed to one made of metal or some other material). He was to take leaders of the people and the priests with him. He was then to go to the Dung Gate, where broken pottery was disposed of. There, Jeremiah was to announce to them to listen to the word of G-d, Who says that He is bringing evil upon that place because they forsook him in favor of idols and filled the place with the blood of innocents. They served the Baal, whose service is counter to G-d's instructions.

Days are coming, G-d says, when the place where Jeremiah was speaking would no longer be called "Tofes" or "Beis Hinnom," but "The Valley of Slaughter." G-d will upset the plans of Judah and Jerusalem from that place and hand them over to their enemies, allowing their carcasses to be food for animals and birds. The city will become a waste, amazing all who see it. As punishment for the children sacrificed to Baal, people will come to eat their own children. After relating this dire prophecy, Jeremiah was to smash the jug in front of the leaders of the people, who accompanied him. He would then say, "Just as one breaks a clay jug and it cannot be repaired, so G-d will do to this nation and its people. Here, in Tofes, they will bury corpses until they run out of room. The whole city will be just like Tofes, all the houses will be like the ones where they worshipped idols.

Jeremiah returned from Tofes and stood in the courtyard of the Temple and announced, "G-d says He is bringing evil on this city and all the cities of the land, because the people are too stubborn to listen to Him!"

## Chapter 20

### Jeremiah is Thoroughly Depressed

A man named Pashchur, who was in charge of the Kohanim (priests) in the Temple, didn't care for Jeremiah's prophecies, so he tossed him in a jail cell. Pashchur released him the next day and Jeremiah said, "G-d doesn't call you 'Pashchur,' He calls you 'Magor Misaviv,'" which means "terror all around." Why did Jeremiah say that this was G-d's name for Pashchur? Because G-d curses Pashchur. He will witness his friends falling to the enemy's sword. The nation will be exiled to Babylonia and the treasures will be plundered. Pashchur will go into captivity and die in exile because he was a false prophet.

Because Pashchur oppressed him, Jeremiah cried out to G-d, Who pressed Jeremiah into his mission, making him the object of verbal and physical attacks. Every time he addresses the people, Jeremiah ends up crying out because he must foretell destruction. This, of course, does not endear him to the people. But what else can

Jeremiah do? If he would refuse to carry out G-d mission, G-d's word would burn inside him like a fire that he is unable to contain. Jeremiah heard the slander of the people against him, plotting to frame him. Those he thought were his friends wait for him to fall. They try to lure him over to their side, to worship idols, but G-d is with him. Jeremiah's enemies will fail and be eternally ashamed.

G-d tests the righteous, looking inside them to see their true intentions. Jeremiah prays to see G-d punish his antagonists. Jeremiah tells the righteous to praise G-d for revealing the plot of the poisoners to him. Jeremiah was feeling so low, he lamented his own conception and birth, going so far as to curse whoever informed his father that he was born, making him think it was a good thing. Jeremiah mourns that he did not die before birth; why did he have to be born to such a miserable existence?

## Chapter 21

### **Only Tzidkiyahu Can Prevent Forest Fires**

King Tzidkiyahu sent Jeremiah two kohanim (priests), Tzefanya and Pashchur the son of Malkiya. (This is a different Pashchur from the one that imprisoned Jeremiah in the previous chapter. That one was the son of Imeir.) These two kohanim asked Jeremiah to speak to G-d about Nebuchadnezzar, who was gearing up to attack them. They hoped that G-d would come to their defense and drive away the Babylonian army. Jeremiah sent them back to the king with a message that G-d would abandon them; He would allow the Babylonians and the Kasdim (Chaldeans) to take the city. G-d will battle against the Jews with great anger, striking down man and beast with a plague.

After this, King Tzidkiyahu, his servants, and the people who remain in Jerusalem, will be spared from the plague and the sword, to be taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, who will kill some and exile others, as he sees fit. G-d tells Jeremiah to say that He places before them two paths: one of life and one of death. Whoever stays in the city will die, but whoever turns himself over to the Kasdim will live. Jerusalem will fall to the Babylonians and Nebuchadnezzar will burn it with fire.

G-d now addresses the king and his court through Jeremiah. He reminds the king of his righteous ancestor, David, and says that instead of eating and drinking in the morning, they should first execute justice and help the oppressed. If not, G-d's anger will burn like fire against them. He stands opposed to Jerusalem, ready to pay them according to their deeds, consuming the city and those around it like a fire does to a forest.

## Chapter 22

### **Harsh Words for the King**

G-d told Jeremiah to go from the Temple to the king's palace and to speak there. The message he was to say was that the king, who sits on David's throne, and his court must perform acts of justice and charity for the

oppressed, not allow strangers, widows and orphans to be even verbally abused, and to allow no innocent blood to be shed. If they would do this, the Davidic dynasty would be allowed to endure with great honor. If not, G-d will make the palace (or possibly the Temple) a ruin.

The king of Judah is like Gilad to G-d (Gilad is the source of healing ointments), but He will make the land a desert, invaders cutting down the trees and casting them into the fire. When the other nations see this, they will ask why G-d allowed His city to be destroyed. The answer? Because they ignored their covenant and strayed with other "gods."

Don't mourn for King Yehoyakim, who will die when he is exiled. It's over for him. Instead, cry for Kings Yehoyachin and Tzidkiyahu, who would continue to suffer degradation. G-d said regarding Tzidkiyahu (here referred to as Shalum) that he would never return, dying in exile.

Woe to the evil King Yehoyakim, whose house was built with no righteousness or justice because he didn't pay his workers. He planned a large mansion for himself, paneled with cedar. The palace he built was sturdy, made to endure, but he will not reign long enough to enjoy it. Yehoyakim's father, King Yoshiyahu (Josiah), was righteous; he performed justice and did not indulge his physical urges. Yehoyakim, on the other hand, cares for nothing but his own profit, no matter who it hurts. He won't be mourned. Instead, he'll have the burial of a donkey, which is dragged out and tossed away, outside the city gates.

Cry for Bashan and Aravim, places that will be destroyed. (Rashi and Radak cite the translation of the Targum Yonasan that Bashan may refer to the Temple mount.) Nebuchadnezzar has defeated the Jews' allies. G-d spoke to the nation in happier times, telling them how to behave, and they refused to listen. They have been stubborn that way going back to the Egyptian exodus. So, the kings are broken, allied nations are defeated and the Jewish people goes into exile. Those who reside in Lebanon among the cedars (meaning the wealthy, who paneled their homes like Yehoyakim) will find no consolation in their creature comforts.

G-d now speaks of Yehoyakim's son, Yehoyachin. Yehoyachin is referred to by a disparaging nickname, Konyahu. (Imagine calling a politician one doesn't care for by a diminutive he doesn't use, like Timmy instead of Timothy.) Though, as king, Yehoyachin is like G-d's "signet ring" which would not normally be removed, G-d will still remove him, delivering him and his mother into the hands of the enemy; they will die in exile. Yehoyachin is worthless to G-d, like a broken vessel that one throws away. The land of Israel is told to hear G-d's word: Yehoyachin will die childless. (It appears from verse 28 that he may have already had children. If this is the case, they would die in his lifetime.) His descendants would not reign after him, as was normally the case. (Indeed, the next and last king of Judah was Yehoyachin's uncle, Tzidkiyahu.)

It should be noted that Yehoyachin is the ancestor of Zerubavel, about whom we will read in Ezra and elsewhere. Zerubavel's grandfather was born after Yehoyachin repented in Babylonian imprisonment. Chagai 2:23 calls Zerubavel a signet ring in a positive sense, showing a reversal of the harsh decree spoken to his ancestor Yehoyachin.

## Chapter 23

### **It Ain't Heavy, It's My Prophecy**

Woe to the evil kings of Judah, who are shepherds that destroy their own flock. Since they have caused the people to be scattered, G-d will pay them back for their evil deeds. G-d will ultimately gather the remainder of those lost flocks and bring them back, to dwell securely. (This refers either to the return after the Babylonian exile or to the Messianic era.) G-d will give them better "shepherds," who will lead them properly and they will have no fear.

Days are coming, G-d says, when he will set up a righteous king of the Davidic dynasty. (This part definitely speaks of the Messianic era; the Second Temple period had no Davidic kings.) At that time, not only Judah, but the lost Tribes of Israel will be saved. This King (i.e., the Messiah) will be referred to as "Hashem is our Righteousness." In the future, people will no longer refer to "G-d, Who took Israel out of Egypt." Instead, they will speak of "G-d, Who returned Israel from the lands where they were exiled."

Jeremiah is distressed because of the false prophets, who only foretell peace and good things; they profane the true word of G-d. The land is full of adultery and false oaths, people use their power for evil - how can they promise peace in such an environment? The role models - prophets and priests - are all false. They even have idols in the Temple! Because of this, their way will be like a slippery path in the dark; they will fall and G-d will punish them during the year of payback (see 11:23, Isaiah 34:8, et al). The so-called "prophets" of Samaria, capital of the Northern Kingdom of the Ten Tribes, spoke in the name of the Baal and misled the people. Ultimately, their nation was exiled. The false prophets in Jerusalem, capital of Israel, commit adultery and act treacherously. They encourage evil and nobody returns from that improper path. The false prophets are like Sodom and the people who follow them are like Gemorrah. G-d will give them trouble like bitterness and poisoned water.

G-d tells the people not to listen to these false messengers; they are sharing a fabrication, not G-d's word. These false prophets, who do not even keep the Torah, certainly do not carry G-d's word! A storm goes forth from G-d and it will come to rest upon the heads of the wicked. G-d's anger will not subside until He fulfills His plans. At the end of days, meaning the Messianic era, they will clearly see this prophecy has been fulfilled. (The fact that Jeremiah tells the people of his generation that they will see it is a reference to the revival of the dead. For more on the revival of the dead, see Daniel chapter 12.) G-d didn't send these prophets; they came up with their own messages and enthusiastically spread them. If they were really G-d's prophets, they would encourage people to follow the Torah and to get back on the path of righteousness.

Isn't G-d close? He's not far away! He fills the Heavens and the Earth and there's no place a person can hide from Him. Obviously, He was aware of what these "prophets" were saying in His Name. How long will they lie, saying that they're prophets? They know that they're not, but they trick people and cause them to forget G-d. A person who has a dream can certainly tell someone about it, but only a real prophecy should be referred to as a message from G-d. The former is like straw, the latter is like wheat, and they shouldn't be mixed together.



G-d's word is like fire - a mere dream would not be mistaken for a prophecy. G-d's word is powerful, like a sledgehammer that smashes rock. G-d opposes the false prophets, who not only make things up, but also steal messages from the true prophets, further complicating matters.

When a person - whether a private citizen, a false prophet or a priest - would ask Jeremiah derisively about the "burden" of his prophecies, he was to reply that they are no burden at all - and that G-d would punish that person for mocking His word! People would ask one another for G-d's reply, but a burden was not to be mentioned in connection with prophecy after that. The only burden will be the one on the person who tried to pervert G-d's word. If people continue to equate true prophecy with a burden, the result will be exile and desolation. The shame they experience will never be forgotten.

## Chapter 24

### Two Baskets of Figs

In a vision, G-d showed Jeremiah two baskets of figs, which were ready to eat, in front of the Temple, after the Babylonian exile. One basket was full of very good, fresh figs. The other basket held figs that were so bad, they were inedible. G-d asked Jeremiah what he saw and Jeremiah told Him.

G-d said, "The exile of Judah is like the good figs; I exiled them among the Chaldeans for their own good and I will protect them. I will keep an eye on them and ultimately restore them to the land. I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them a heart to know Me; they will be My people and I will be their G-d. They will return to Me sincerely."

"The bad figs," G-d continued, "are King Tzidkiyahu and his court, the people who remain in Jerusalem and those who went to Egypt. They will be a horror and an example for the nations of the world. I will send the sword, famine and plague against them until they are wiped off the face of the land."

## Chapter 25

### A Dire Prophecy for the Entire World

By Rabbi Jack Abramowitz

G-d spoke to Jeremiah about the kingdom of Judah in the fourth year of King Yehoyakim of Judah, which was also the first year of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia. Jeremiah repeated the prophecy to the people, saying, "G-d has spoken to me for the past 23 years, but you would not listen. Prophets would come to you every morning, but you paid no attention. You were told to give up your evil ways and that if you did, you could remain safely in the land G-d has given you forever. Don't provoke G-d by worshipping idols. But you wouldn't listen, so G-d has said that He is sending the Babylonians to destroy the land. If you won't carry out G-d's will,

Nebuchadnezzar will! Sounds of rejoicing will cease from Jerusalem, neither a wedding nor a bris (circumcision). The land will be empty as you serve the king of Babylonia for 70 years. At the end of this period, G-d will pay the Babylonians and the Chaldeans for their sins, making their lands eternally desolate. G-d will fulfill all the prophecies He made about those nations (recorded later, at the end of this Book). Other nations will conquer them, paying them back for their own evil."

Jeremiah was instructed to take a cup of the "wine of wrath" from G-d's "hand" and to give it to the nations, to drink. They will reel from it and become confused because of it. In his vision, Jeremiah passed this cup around to the various nations. Jerusalem and Judah were made desolate and an example to the nations. Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and his people were struck next. Then the kings in the land of Utz (in Edom), the Philistines, Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and those who remained in Ashdod. (Ashdod was partially ruined by Egypt before Nebuchadnezzar got his hands on it.) Then, the rest of Edom, Moav and Amon, Tzor (Tyre), Tzidon, and the kings of the island. (According to Rashi, the nations mentioned so far are the neighbors of Israel.) Next, Dedan (descendants of Abraham's second wife, Ketura - see Genesis 25:3), Tema (descendants of Ishmael - Genesis 25:15), Buz, and the entire Arabian peninsula. Then Zimri (possibly another descendant of Keturah), Elam and the Medes, the kings of the north, and the rest of the nations. The king of Sheshach will be punished last. ("Sheshach" is "Bavel," Babylonia, in At-bash, in which the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is switched with the last, the second with the next-to-last, etc. The reasons Bavel might be written in At-bash are beyond the scope of this synopsis.)

G-d tells the nations through Jeremiah to drink from this cup. They will get drunk and sick, then fall and be unable to get up because of the coming wars. If they refuse to take the cup from Jeremiah, he will tell them that G-d says to drink - if He's bringing evil on Jerusalem, which is "the City of G-d," do other nations expect to be excused? G-d will call loudly from the Heavens, decreeing destruction upon them. G-d has issues to settle with the nations. Evil will go forth from nation to nation, a massive storm from the ends of the world. Those killed by G-d's decree will not be mourned or buried; they will simply lie on the ground like dung. So cry out, kings of the nations, since your days to kill one another have come and you will break like a crystal glass. The kings and their nations - here called "shepherds" and "flocks" - will not be able to escape when G-d ravages their "pastures." Tranquil lands will be destroyed in G-d's fury when He goes forth like a lion. The land will be destroyed by the enemy's sword and because of G-d's anger.

## Chapter 26

### Both Sides Cite Precedents

G-d spoke to Jeremiah at the start of the reign of King Yehoyakim of Judah. (This chapter occurs four years before the previous chapter.) He told Jeremiah to stand in the Temple courtyard and to speak to the inhabitants of all the cities of Judah. Knowing that He was about to give Jeremiah a harsh message that would not be happily received by the people, G-d stressed that Jeremiah was not to leave out one word. If they would listen and change their ways, G-d would not bring upon them the evil He had planned. This was G-d's message:

"If you do not listen, to follow My laws and heed My prophets, then I will destroy the Temple like I did the Tabernacle at Shiloh." The priests of Baal and the false prophets heard this prophecy and seized Jeremiah, threatening him with death. They claimed that predicting the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem was treason. Jeremiah replied that he repeated what G-d had instructed him to say. "Change your ways and listen to G-d," he said. "I am in your hands; do with me as you see fit! But if you kill me, you will have killed an innocent man."

The officers of the people defended Jeremiah because he was a prophet, speaking the truth. Then, some elders got involved. They recounted an incident that occurred in the time of King Chizkiyahu, about a century earlier.

During the reign of King Chizkiyahu, Micha the Morashti (one of the twelve "minor" prophets) foretold that Jerusalem and the Temple Mount would become ruins. Chizkiyahu didn't persecute him; he accepted the message and prayed to G-d, Who accepted his prayers.

While there was precedent to accept Jeremiah's words, the prophet's detractors also had prior cases to cite. Much more recently, during the reign of King Yehoyakim, Uriahu the son of Shmayahu similarly foretold the fate of Jerusalem and the land. King Yehoyakim and his officers sought to kill him, so Uriahu ran away to Egypt. Yehoyakim had him extradited, executed and given an unceremonious burial. Achikam, the son of Shafan, protected Jeremiah and did not let the mob get him. (Achikam was one of the messengers who visited the prophetess Chuldah in 2 Kings 22. He was the father of Gedaliah, who was assassinated in 2 Kings 25 and for whose death we fast on Tzom Gedaliah.)

## Chapter 27

### **Making Yokes**

In the start of Yehoyakim's reign, G-d spoke to Jeremiah and told him to make yokes of straps and bars and to place them on his neck. He was then to send the yokes to the kings of Edom, Moav, Amon, Tzor and Tzidon. The message accompanying the yokes would be that G-d has delivered these nations, man and beast, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. The nations will serve him, his son and his grandson, until Babylonia itself is judged. Whatever nation does not serve Nebuchadnezzar, metaphorically placing their neck in Babylonia's yoke, will fall to war, famine and plague.

Jeremiah continued: Don't listen to false prophets who tell you that this won't happen! Their lies will cause you to be exiled. If you listen to the word of G-d, you will be able to remain in your lands, serving Nebuchadnezzar.

Even though this prophecy was spoken during the reign of Yehoyakim, it was fulfilled in the time of Tzidkiyahu, who is also referenced by Jeremiah when he spoke to the kings of the various nations. "Why should you and your subjects die when you can submit and live? Don't listen to the false prophets who only predict

peace; G-d did not send them. Their lies will cause you to be driven out. They're lying when they say that the vessels of the Temple, which were already exiled with Yehoyachin, will be quickly returned. If they're really prophets, let them pray to G-d that the remaining vessels of the Temple not be exiled at all! G-d has declared that the pillars, the "sea," and the rest of the vessels that Nebuchadnezzar did not take when Yehoyachin was exiled, would be brought to Babylonia, where they would remain until G-d returns them to the land.

## Chapter 28

### Breaking Yokes

At the beginning of the reign of Tzidkiyahu, a man named Chananya spoke to Jeremiah in the Temple, in the presence of the priests and the people. (This is NOT the more familiar Chananya, from the Book of Daniel, so don't confuse them!) Chananya said, "G-d says that He has broken the yoke of Babylonia! In two years, He will restore all the Temple vessels that were carried off, as well as King Yehoyachin and all the people who were exiled."

Of course, Jeremiah knew that his own prophecies were true and that Chananya's was false, but Jeremiah was predicting exile and Chananya was foretelling redemption, so Jeremiah preferred Chananya's words to his own. He said, "Amen. So may G-d do. May G-d fulfill your words and return the people and the vessels from Babylonia! But... Prophets before me predicted destruction. When another prophet contradicted them and predicted peace, he would only be believed if his words came true."

Jeremiah was wearing one of the yokes he had made. Chananya took it off Jeremiah's neck and broke the bar. Chananya said, "G-d says he will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar in two years!" Jeremiah left.

After he departed, G-d spoke to Jeremiah and told him to go back to Chananya with a message: You broke a bar of wood, so instead you'll have bars of iron. (In other words, by rebelling against what G-d had said through Jeremiah, Chananya had actually made things worse.) G-d now places an iron yoke on the nations to serve Nebuchadnezzar.

Jeremiah told Chananya, "G-d didn't send you and you comforted the people with lies. Therefore, you will die within the year." And he did.

While Chananya was punished for his false prophecy, Jeremiah was also wrong. He should not have expressed preference for Chananya's false words over his own true words, even if they were more comforting. Because he honored the false prophet, Jeremiah was punished by falling into the hands of Chananya's grandson, as we will see in chapter 37.

## Chapter 29

### False Prophets Called to Task

Jeremiah sent a scroll to the elders who were exiled with Yehoyachin, as well as the priests, prophets and people who were already exiled to Babylonia. The scroll said that they might as well get comfortable in exile: build houses, plant gardens, get married and have families. They should seek the peace of their new cities, because they're going to be staying there; the peace of the city will be their peace. They should not let false prophets mislead them and if they have a dream to the contrary, it's just a dream. There will be 70 years of Babylonian exile, at the end of which G-d will bring them back.

G-d exiled them for their ultimate peace, to give them a future. The Jewish people will eventually turn to G-d and He will answer them. They will seek G-d and find Him, and He will return the exiles from all the nations. Don't believe false "prophets" who claim to represent G-d in exile. G-d has said regarding King Tzidkiyahu (who was not exiled) and the people remaining in Jerusalem that there would be war, famine and plague. They would be like the inedible figs (in chapter 24) and would serve as an example to the nations of the world. G-d sent them prophets to warn them, but the people ignored His messengers.

G-d spoke regarding two false prophets named Ahab the son of Kolayah and Tzidkiyahu the son of Ma'aseya. They will fall into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, who will kill them. They will become a curse among the people, "May you be like Ahab and Tzidkiyahu, whom Nebuchadnezzar burned to death." Why were these two false prophets singled out for such a punishment? They not only spoke falsely in G-d's name, they committed adultery with other men's wives. (The Talmud in Sanhedrin 93a says that they used their position as "prophets" to convince those women that G-d wanted them to be unfaithful with them.)

G-d also spoke regarding Shemayahu the Nechelami. He pretended to be a prophet and sent letters to the people in Jerusalem and the kohanim (priests), saying that G-d appointed a Kohein named Tzefania to be the High Priest in place of Yehoyada. Shemayahu said that Tzefania and some other priests were officers over madmen and self-proclaimed prophets, with the authority to imprison them. Since that is the case (Shemayahu said), why hasn't Tzefania stopped Jeremiah? The exile is essentially Jeremiah's fault (Shemayahu said), since he told everyone to get comfortable because it's going to be a long stay!

Tzefania read this letter to Jeremiah and G-d told him to relate to the people in exile that Shemayahu was a false prophet, not sent by Him. Therefore, none of Shemayahu's descendants will ever hold any office of power or influence. Furthermore, Shemayahu himself will not witness the redemption.

## Chapter 30

### In Messianic Times

G-d told Jeremiah to write a scroll with the following message: Days are coming when G-d would restore His people, the nations of Israel and Judah, to the land He gave their ancestors. A sound of terror has been heard,

fear rather than peace. (Rashi cites a Midrash that this refers to the war of Gog and Magog, heralding the Messianic era, as we shall see in Ezekiel 38-39.) Men don't give birth, so why are men holding themselves like women in labor? (The pains preceding the Messianic era are called the "birth pangs of the Messiah" and are compared to labor pains.) The day of the downfall of Babylonia (or, perhaps, of Gog) will be unprecedented, but also a time of trouble for the Jews, through which they will be saved. On that day, their servitude to other nations will be cast off; they will only serve G-d and Moshiach (the Messiah) will be their king.

The Jewish people are told not to fear because G-d will save them and their descendants from the lands of their captivity, then they will have peace and no one will antagonize them. G-d will save them and make an end of the nations that oppressed them. The Jews, however, will not be destroyed, as G-d will have punished them for their sins.

The injury inflicted on the Jews is severe; nobody thinks they can be healed. Their allies (Egypt and Assyria) have abandoned them; everyone has written Israel off because G-d has punished them so heavily. Why do they cry from their pain? It is commensurate with their sins!

Those who ravaged Israel will be ravaged; the captors will become captives. Israel will be healed of her wounds. The exiles will return; Jerusalem and the Temple will be rebuilt. Sounds of rejoicing will be heard from there and the people will only increase in number. They will be as precious to G-d as they used to be and their oppressors will be punished.

Their ruler (the Messiah) will emerge from among them and G-d will bring him close. Israel will be G-d's people and He will be their G-d. A storm has gone forth from G-d and it will come to rest on the wicked. G-d's anger will not be sated until He has fulfilled what He said. Then, G-d will be G-d over the whole nation and they will be His people.

## Chapter 31

### **In the Future, Kiruv Will Be a Thing of the Past**

G-d said that the Jews who left Egypt found favor in the desert, so He gave them rest when they took possession of the land of Israel. G-d appeared to Jeremiah and said that He loves the Jewish people with an eternal love, which is why He draws us close to Him with kindness. He will rebuild the nation and there will once again be rejoicing. Vineyards will be planted on the mountains of Samaria. A day will come when the watchmen call out to go to the Temple mount, to rejoice there. The Jews will sing to G-d and ask His help to redeem the rest of the exiles. He will bring the exiles of Judah from Babylonia and the Ten Tribes from the ends of the Earth. They will come slowly, so that the blind and infirm can easily travel with the rest of the nation. The people will weep from joy and in repentance and G-d will lead them on a straight and smooth path.

G-d tells the nations of the world to hear His word; the One Who caused Israel to be dispersed gathers them together to be His flock. He redeemed Israel and saved them from enemies who were stronger than they were. They will rejoice on the Temple mount and enjoy G-d's goodness in the form of corn, wine, oil, sheep

and cattle. Their souls will be satisfied, like a well-watered garden, and they will know no fear. Young women will dance; old men will join young men in rejoicing. Mourning will turn into joy and the priests will rejoice in the return of the Temple service.

A voice is heard; it is the matriarch Rachel, weeping for her children who have not returned from exile. (The Radak cites the Midrash, which states that the Jews passed by Rachel's Tomb on their way into exile and she prayed to G-d for mercy on them.) G-d tells Rachel not to cry because they are coming back. (Rachel's merit is that she welcomed her rival Leah into her household, rather than embarrass her.) Even though most of Rachel's descendants, the Tribes of Ephraim and Menashe, would not return after the Babylonian exile, they will return in the Messianic era. G-d acknowledges Ephraim complaining that they have suffered many years in exile and asking to be led back; they regret their transgressions. G-d agrees to have mercy on Ephraim, who is a precious child to Him and He longs to be reunited.

G-d tells the Jews to set up "signs" - good deeds, like their ancestors had - showing them the way to return. They should no longer hide in shame, because G-d has created something new: women will court men. (In our recurring metaphor, G-d is the husband and Israel is the wife.) When the Jews return from exile, they will bless the Temple saying that G-d should no longer permit her to be destroyed. The people of Judah will dwell in their territory, for G-d will have invigorated the spirits of the people.

Jeremiah was pleased when he awoke from this vision. (With the exception of Moses, prophets received their visions in a trance-like state.) Days are coming when G-d will "plant" the people and they will increase. As they will be demolished, so will they be rebuilt. People will no longer say that they eat "unripe grapes" (a metaphor for sin) and that children suffer for their parents' sins; everyone will be responsible for his own actions alone.

G-d will make a new covenant with the Jews, different from the one they made after they left Egypt, which they broke. He will place His Torah in their hearts. People won't have to tell others about G-d, because everyone will know Him and He will forgive their sins. He made the sun and the other Heavenly bodies and He makes the oceans churn. As long as these things follow the laws of nature (which He set up), Israel will endure. Just as the Heavens can never be measured, Israel can never be rejected by G-d. The day is coming when Jerusalem will be rebuilt, never to be destroyed again.

This well-known chapter includes some verses made even more famous in song. "A voice is heard...it is Rachel weeping..." may be known by many as the song "Kol Berama." Similarly, many people may know "Is Ephraim a precious son..." from the song "Haben Yakir Li."

## Chapter 32

### A Surprising Real Estate Deal

G-d spoke to Jeremiah in the tenth year of the reign of King Tzidkiyahu of Judah, which was the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylonia. Babylonia was in the midst of their siege on Jerusalem and Jeremiah was in prison. Tzidkiyahu had imprisoned Jeremiah because of his prophecies, that Jerusalem would fall to the



Babylonians and that the king himself would become a captive. Tzidkiyahu will be a prisoner in Babylonia until G-d chooses to remember him (which Rashi says is a euphemism for until Tzidkiyahu dies). Furthermore, if Judah attempts to fight the Kasdim (Chaldeans), they will lose.

The above was not what G-d said to Jeremiah at this time; it was why Tzidkiyahu had imprisoned him. Here is the message G-d gave Jeremiah in prison: Jeremiah's cousin Chanamel is coming to see him. He's going to ask Jeremiah to use his right of redemption to purchase a field of his in Anasos.

Sure enough, Chanamel showed up and asked Jeremiah as his close relative to purchase the field he was selling. Jeremiah knew this was G-d's will, so he bought the field from his cousin. He paid him and signed a bill of sale. Jeremiah took the deed and gave it to his student, the prophet Baruch. He charged Baruch in front of witnesses to take the deed, along with some other documents, and to put them in a clay jar so that they will last a long time. (The Dead Sea Scrolls were more or less preserved in pottery for almost 2,000 years, so you can see that works!) Jeremiah said in the name of G-d that the sale was not in vain because someday the Jews will return to the land of Israel and buy and sell property and build houses, as they did before their exile. (Jeremiah himself never took possession of the field; the transaction was symbolic of the Jews' ultimate return as a people.)

Jeremiah prayed when he gave Baruch the deed saying, "G-d, You made Heaven and Earth, and nothing is hidden from You. You perform acts of kindness to multitudes and punish those who persist in their ancestors' evil ways. G-d sees all the acts of mankind and pays each person accordingly. He performed miracles in Egypt that are still talked about today, bringing the Jewish people out with signs and wonders. G-d gave them the land of Israel and they possessed it, but they did not continue to follow His ways, so the Chaldeans are bringing their siege engines to take the land away from the Jews. The famine, plague and sword are already happening; G-d's word is coming to pass! And yet, G-d told Jeremiah to buy a field!"

G-d spoke again to Jeremiah saying, "Is anything hidden from Me? I'm giving this city to the Chaldeans and Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylonia. The Chaldeans will burn the city, destroying the buildings where incense was offered to Baal and sacrifices to idols. The people have angered Me since this city was built, so I'm going to remove it. The people of Israel, the people of Judah and their kings, their prophets, their priests - they all provoked Me. They turned their backs on Me. I sent prophets to correct them, but they wouldn't listen. They put idols in the Temple and worshipped idols like Baal and Molech." (The service of Molech involved passing children through fire, which G-d finds especially heinous.) Because of this, G-d is giving the city to the invaders. But He will ultimately have mercy on them and gather them back from the lands where they will be scattered. (This applies to both the nation of Judah and the Northern Kingdom of Israel.) They will be restored to the land, where they will then dwell securely. They will naturally defer to G-d's will and it will be good for them. They will have an everlasting covenant with G-d, Who will rejoice over them.

G-d says that as He brought evil upon the nation, so He will bring ultimate good. Then, fields will once again be bought and sold in the land; nobody will say that the land has been laid waste by the invaders. People will write deeds and bills of sale all throughout the territories of Judah and Benjamin, mountains and plains, as G-d had Jeremiah do at the start of this chapter.

One last interesting note: Verse 35 of this chapter says that the altar of Baal was in a place called the valley of the son of Hinnom, Gei ben Hinnom in Hebrew. A shorter version of this name, Gehinnom, is used as the Jewish name for Hell.

## Chapter 33

### More Prophecies in Prison

G-d spoke to Jeremiah again, while he was still in prison. G-d said that if Jeremiah prayed to Him, He would answer and He would tell him important things.

G-d spoke about the houses of Jerusalem and the palaces of the kings of Judah, which were razed to make mounds for warfare with the Kasdim (Chaldeans) and to reinforce the city wall against the invaders. The houses had to be demolished because the Jews insisted on fighting the Kasdim, rather than accepting them as their conquerors as G-d had said. The former sites of these houses are now graves for those killed in battle. G-d allowed this because of the people's evil deeds, but He will ultimately heal them and bring peace. The captives of Judah and Israel will return and be established as they had been before. They will be purified of their sins and G-d will forgive them.

When this happens, it will be a kiddush Hashem - a sanctification of G-d's Name among the nations of the world, who will tremble before Him. Then, the desolate cities of Judah and streets of Jerusalem will once again ring with the sounds of rejoicing and weddings and people thanking G-d for His goodness. They will bring sacrifices to the Temple to thank G-d because He will have restored the exiles to their homeland. Jerusalem, which had been made desolate of both people and animals, will once again be home to shepherds and their flocks. In the Negev, in the territory of Benjamin, and throughout the rest of Judah, flocks will once again pass under the hand of a loving shepherd - not only literally, but metaphorically, as the people are returned under the rule of a righteous king. (Presumably, this refers to the Messianic era, as the period of the Second Temple had no Davidic king.)

Days are coming, G-d says, when He will fulfill the good things He has promised. He will establish the offspring of David (i.e., the Messiah), who will perform acts of justice and righteousness. Judah and Jerusalem will be safe and secure; they will be called "G-d is our Righteousness." (This is also a name used for the Messiah in chapter 23.) G-d said that the Davidic dynasty would never be completely cut off. Similarly, there will always be Kohanim (priests) from the Tribe of Levi to perform the Temple service.

G-d continued: Just as His arrangement with day and night, to proceed in their proper times, cannot be broken, similarly His covenant with David cannot be broken. Just like the stars and the grains of sand cannot be counted, that's how the house of David and the Leviim (Levites) will be increased. The people claim that G-d has rejected the royal family of David and the Priestly Levites. Not so! Like day and night, like Torah itself, these two families will endure! The family of David will continue to reign when the Jews are ultimately redeemed from their captivity.

More familiar verses: portions of verses 10 and 11 comprise the song “Od Yishama,” which is actually part of the Sheva Brachos, the Seven Benedictions recited at a wedding and the subsequent celebratory meals.

## Chapter 34

### **You’re Free! (Just Kidding!)**

G-d spoke to Jeremiah while Nebuchadnezzar was besieging Jerusalem. He told Jeremiah to go speak to Tzidkiyahu, the king of Judah. (Apparently this incident occurred while Jeremiah was not in prison.) Jeremiah was instructed to say that the city would fall to the Babylonians and the king would be among the captives. However, Tzidkiyahu would not be killed; he would die in peace and be mourned by the people. (Apparently, the people were not permitted to honor those executed by the Babylonian kings.)

Jeremiah received another message from G-d after Tzidkiyahu made a deal with the people of Jerusalem to free their Jewish servants. The people had agreed and freed their servants, but later they reneged and pressed their former servants back into service. G-d’s message was that He made a covenant with the people when He brought them out of Egypt: servitude of a Jewish slave would be six years and in the seventh they go free. But the people’s ancestors violated this rule (as they did many others). So the people of Jeremiah’s generation did the right thing by freeing their servants, but then they went and messed it up! Since they refused others freedom, G-d is “freeing” them to war, famine and plague. (The idea is that the people are G-d’s servants and He is “freeing” them from His domain, which makes them fair game for this kind of destruction.)

The people had made a pact, by cutting a calf in half, to rebel against deal with Tzidkiyahu and G-d’s law regarding slaves. G-d will deal with these people. They will fall to their enemies and become food for scavengers. Tzidkiyahu and his court, however, will go into captivity. G-d will call the departing invaders back to Jerusalem, which they will burn and sack, as they would do with other cities of Judah.

## Chapter 35

### **Bottoms Up!**

G-d spoke to Jeremiah during the reign of King Yehoyakim of Judah, making this a decade or two earlier than the prophecy recorded in the previous chapter. (They’re not in chronological order.) G-d told Jeremiah to go to the Rechavim (also known as the Kenites), who were descendants of Yisro (Jethro), the father-in-law of Moses. They were to be brought to the Temple and given wine to drink. So Jeremiah brought the whole family to the Temple and gave them cups of wine. He told them to drink up, but they replied that they don’t drink. Their ancestor, Yonadav the son of Rechav, commanded his descendants to abstain from wine forever. They were also instructed not to build houses or plant fields, but to live in tents. (The Kenites were not landowners and were able to move about. They apparently eschewed city life.) And so, they heed the words of their

ancestor. However, when Nebuchadnezzar first invaded, the Kenites migrated to Jerusalem for refuge and had no alternative but to live in houses in the city.

G-d told Jeremiah to say to the people of Judah and Jerusalem that they should learn a lesson from the Kenites. They listen to their ancestor's words and abstain from wine. Yonadav was a human and hasn't spoken to his descendants since he died. G-d is G-d and He sent constant reminders through the prophets saying that the Jews should give up their evil ways and return to Him, but they still won't listen! So, all the catastrophes G-d warned about will come to pass, but the Kenites will be rewarded. Because they were careful to follow their ancestor's instructions, G-d will see to it that there will always be members of their family serving him. (According to the Midrash, cited by the Radak, they were great rabbis and members of the Sanhedrin. Additionally, many of the daughters married Kohanim and had sons who served in the Temple.)

## Chapter 36

### The Invisible Man

In the fourth year of the reign of King Yehoyakim of Judah, G-d spoke to Jeremiah. He told Jeremiah to take a scroll and to write in it all the prophecies He had given him until that point. If the people of Judah reviewed this book, they might repent and avert disaster. So Jeremiah called his student, the prophet Baruch, and dictated the Book of Jeremiah up to this point. (Some say it was Eicha, the Book of Lamentations, which was also written by Jeremiah. If so, then Eicha was written prophetically mourning over Jerusalem's destruction before it actually occurred.)

Jeremiah said to Baruch, "I am in prison, so I cannot go to the Temple. You will have to go and read the scroll to the people, on a fast day." (This is not the same imprisonment that Jeremiah had in chapters 32-33. That was later, under King Tzidkiyahu. Jeremiah managed to get himself thrown in jail several times, as the kings really didn't care for his prophecies.)

Baruch read the scroll as he had been instructed. King Yehoyakim declared a fast day in Jerusalem and Baruch read Jeremiah's scroll in the Temple. Michayahu the son of Gemaryahu heard the scroll and went to the palace where his father and other officers were gathered. He told them what he had heard and the officers sent a "cease and desist" order to Baruch. He brought the scroll to the officers, who asked to hear it for themselves. When they heard the words, they were troubled and assured Baruch that they would tell the king. Next, the officers asked Baruch whether the scroll contained Jeremiah's prophecies verbatim or Baruch's paraphrase of them. (The practical difference would be how much they should worry about the details. It's one thing if G-d spelled it out to Jeremiah and another if Baruch embellished the prophecies for effect.) Baruch assured them that the content of the scroll was word-for-word as dictated to him by Jeremiah. The officers recommended to Baruch that he hide himself and instruct Jeremiah to do likewise (as best he could in prison), because the king was not likely to care for the negative prophecies.

The officers went to King Yehoyakim and gave the scroll to the scribe for safekeeping before telling the king its contents. The king had the scroll brought to him and read. (It was winter, so he had a fire burning for warmth.) When only three or four verses had been read (three or four pages, according to the Radak), the king sliced the scroll with a razor and threw the scroll on the fire. He simply wasn't concerned by what he had heard. Some of his officers asked him not to burn the scroll, but the king would not comply.

King Yehoyakim instructed some of his men to go and get Jeremiah and Baruch, but G-d had hidden them. (The Radak says miraculously. He suggests that G-d enveloped them in darkness or made their pursuers unable to see them.)

G-d told Jeremiah to write the scroll over again, plus a message for Yehoyakim: You burned the scroll because it foretold that Nebuchadnezzar would raze the land. Therefore, G-d says that Yehoyakim's line would lose the throne and his corpse would be tossed out. Jeremiah re-wrote the scroll, along with the updates. (And, as we know from the Book of Kings, Yehoyakim's son ruled only three months before he was succeeded by his uncle, Tzidkiyahu. Furthermore, We read more about Yehoyakim's funeral - or lack thereof - earlier, in chapter 22. Remember, these prophecies are not necessarily collected in chronological order!)

## Chapter 37

### Minimum Security

Yehoyakim's son Yehoyachin was removed from office by Nebuchadnezzar and replaced with Tzidkiyahu, fulfilling the prophecy of the previous chapter. However, in Yehoyakim's day, the people were willing to follow Jeremiah, but the king stopped them. In Tzidkiyahu's day, neither the king nor the people were willing to heed the prophet.

Tzidkiyahu sent messengers to ask Jeremiah to pray to G-d for the nation against Nebuchadnezzar. (Jeremiah was free at this time and not in prison.) The Egyptian army was coming to assist and the Chaldean forces withdrew. (Egypt was an ally of Judah; the Chaldeans were with Babylonia.) G-d told Jeremiah to tell the king's delegation that the Egyptian army was returning home. The Chaldean forces would return and burn the city. Even if the army of Judah struck every Chaldean soldier, the wounded would still burn Jerusalem.

While the Chaldean forces were away (and the city not sealed), Jeremiah left Jerusalem to take care of some personal business in the territory of Benjamin. He was in the gate of Jerusalem that opens into Benjamin, when he was apprehended by an officer of the army named Yiriyah, who accused the prophet of trying to defect to the enemy. Of course, he denied the charges, but they wouldn't believe him. Jeremiah was arrested and thrown into prison, where he remained for a long time. (This prison was worse than the other - more "maximum security.") After a while, King Tzidkiyahu sent for him and privately asked if there was any prophecy from G-d that he should know about. There was: that Tzidkiyahu himself would fall into the hands of the Babylonians. Then Jeremiah asked what he had done to deserve imprisonment. "Where are your false prophets, who foretold good things?" Jeremiah asked the king. Finally, Jeremiah requested not to be returned to the prison,

for he would surely die there. Tzidkiyahu had Jeremiah returned to the “minimum security” prison instead of the harsher one. He also granted him a daily loaf of bread, which continued until bread became unavailable. But Jeremiah did remain imprisoned.

(Yiriyah, the guard who arrested Jeremiah, was the grandson of Chananya, the false prophet in chapter 28. Falling into his hands was Jeremiah’s punishment for dignifying Chananya’s prophecy, even though he knew it was false. Presumably Yiriyah sought a pretext to arrest Jeremiah, to avenge his family’s honor after the prophet showed up his grandfather.)

## Chapter 38

### A Pit Full of Mud

Some of Tzidkiyahu’s officers heard Jeremiah prophesying. Jeremiah was saying that those who stayed in Jerusalem would perish in the siege and its aftermath, but those who gave themselves up to the Kasdim (Chaldeans) would survive. The officers considered this treasonous and reported him to the king. Tzidkiyahu’s reaction is not 100% clear, but it appears to be an exasperated, “Do what you want.” So the officers arrested Jeremiah and had him tossed into a pit of mud.

An Ethiopian named Eved-Melech, a member of the king’s court, heard about this and went to see the king. (Rashi quotes a Midrash that Eved-Melech was actually Jeremiah’s student, the prophet Baruch, but we’ll continue to call him Eved-Melech here.) Eved-Melech complained to the king about the officers casting Jeremiah into the muddy pit; if he had been left alone, he would have died in the famine, but they have hastened his death. The king told Eved-Melech to get thirty men to pull Jeremiah out of the pit. (Why so many? Either to avoid resistance from Jeremiah’s detractors, who would be outnumbered by Eved-Melech’s group, or because everyone was weakened from the famine.) Eved-Melech gathered the group and went to Jeremiah in the pit. They threw him worn-out clothes to put under his arms, so that he wouldn’t be hurt by the ropes when they pulled him up. So, Jeremiah was saved from the pit, but he did remain in jail.

King Tzidkiyahu sent for Jeremiah. He asked the prophet to speak freely and tell him of any prophecies he had received. Jeremiah balked because experience told him that the king wouldn’t listen - if anything, he would seek to execute the prophet! Tzidkiyahu swore that he would neither harm Jeremiah, nor hand him over to his enemies. So Jeremiah told the king that if he surrendered to Babylonia, he would live and the city would not be burned. However, if they resisted, the city would be burned and Tzidkiyahu would not escape. The king replied that he was afraid to fall into the hands of the Jews who had already defected to the Kasdim, that they would torture him. Jeremiah assured him that this would not happen. If the king gives himself up, he will live. If he resists, the women of his court will end up being taken by the officers of Babylonia. These captive women will say that the false prophets, who predicted peace, hated Tzidkiyahu and tricked him into making destructive choices. Tzidkiyahu’s wives and sons will be captives and the king himself would be captured and brought before Nebuchadnezzar. Finally, Jerusalem will burn.

Tzidkiyahu charged Jeremiah with revealing this conversation to no one. When the king's officers asked what transpired, Jeremiah was only to tell them that he asked not to be returned to the harsher "maximum security" prison. Sure enough, the officers asked Jeremiah what happened and he replied as he had been instructed. Jeremiah was returned to his less-harsh prison conditions, where he was to remain until Jerusalem fell.

## Chapter 39

### Eating a WHAT??

In the ninth year of Tzidkiyahu's reign, in the month of Teves, Nebuchadnezzar started his siege of Jerusalem. In the eleventh year of Tzidkiyahu's reign, in the month of Tamuz, the city wall was breached. The Babylonian officers entered and occupied the courtyard of the Temple. When Tzidkiyahu and his army saw them, they ran away by night, through a secret passageway. The Chaldean army pursued them and caught Tzidkiyahu in Jericho. They brought him to Nebuchadnezzar in Rivla, which is identified as Antioch in modern Turkey. Nebuchadnezzar called Tzidkiyahu to task for rebelling against him. (According to the Talmud in Nedarim 65a, Nebuchadnezzar chastised Tzidkiyahu for revealing that he had seen the Babylonian ruler eat a live hare.) Nebuchadnezzar started by killing Tzidkiyahu's sons in his presence, then the Sanhedrin who had annulled Tzidkiyahu's oath. (The oath was either to obey Nebuchadnezzar or not to reveal what he had seen.) Then, he blinded Tzidkiyahu and had him bound in chains in order to be brought to Babylonia as a captive.

The Kasdim burned the palaces and houses of Jerusalem, and demolished the city walls. The people who remained were exiled to Babylonia by Nebuzaradan, Nebuchadnezzar's officer. Nebuzaradan let the poor people remain in Jerusalem and he gave them fields and vineyards. (The logic behind this move was that if he made their lives better under Babylonian rule, they would be loyal.)

And what of Jeremiah? Nebuchadnezzar gave Nebuzaradan charge over the prophet, instructing him not to allow harm to befall him and to follow whatever Jeremiah would tell him. (Why? Because as bad as Jeremiah's prophecies were for Israel, that's how good they were for Babylonia - at least for the time being.) So Nebuzaradan and other officers took Jeremiah out of prison. They turned Jeremiah over to Gedaliah the son of Achikam, who had followed the prophet's instructions to defect and had been appointed governor over the Jews remaining in Jerusalem. Gedaliah pardoned Jeremiah, who was then permitted to move about freely.

G-d had spoken to Jeremiah while he was still in prison, telling him to go to Eved-Melech, the man who had him pulled out of the mud pit. Jeremiah was to tell Eved-Melech that, even though evil was befalling the city, Eved-Melech would not be harmed. Through his righteous actions, Eved-Melech had managed to secure his own life.



## Chapter 40

### Gedaliah in Charge

G-d spoke to Jeremiah again, after he was in the custody of Nebuzaradan; Jeremiah was in chains, just like the rest of the exiles from Jerusalem. (We'll see what G-d said in a moment.)

Nebuzaradan said to Jeremiah, "G-d predicted bad things about this place, and He has brought them to pass because the people would not listen to Him. Because this nation was conquered by G-d, I'm going to remove your shackles. You can come with me to Babylonia and I will take care of you, or you can stay here."

G-d told Jeremiah to remain with Gedaliah, who had been appointed governor over the people remaining in Jerusalem. Nebuzaradan gave Jeremiah gifts and sent him on his way. Jeremiah came to Gedaliah and lived with the people who remained in Mitzpah, a city in the territory of Benjamin, not far from Jerusalem.

The officers of the army of Judah, who had fled from the Chaldean onslaught and hidden themselves, heard that Gedaliah had been appointed governor over those who remained. A man named Yishmael ben Netanyahu (who was of royal descent), along with Yochanan and Yonasan, the sons of Kareach, and others, went to Gedaliah. Gedaliah told them not to fear; as long as they served the Chaldeans and Nebuchadnezzar, they could remain in the land unmolested. Gedaliah said that he would always remain in Mitzpah, to liaise with the Chaldeans.

Furthermore, the Jews who had fled to the neighboring lands of Amon, Moav and Edom heard about Gedaliah's appointment and they returned to Judah. Life actually improved in Judah, and the people enjoyed an abundance of wine and figs, without fear that invading armies would seize them.

Then, the aforementioned Yochanan and other officers who had gone into hiding went to Gedaliah and asked, "Did you know that the king of Amon sent Yishmael the son of Netanya to assassinate you?" Gedaliah did not believe the charge, so Yochanan asked for permission to preemptively assassinate Yishmael. If Gedaliah were assassinated, Yochanan said, the Jews would be scattered and lost. But Gedaliah refused to allow this, because he simply didn't believe the accusation.

## Chapter 41

### Tzom Gedaliah

It was on Rosh Hashana, at the festive meal, that Yishmael the son of Netanya and ten accomplices went to Gedaliah in Mitzpah. They assassinated Gedaliah, as well as the Chaldean officers who were on the premises. Two days later, before the news had been well-publicized, eighty men came from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria, mourning over the destruction of the Temple. (They were still carrying the flour they intended to offer; the Temple had been destroyed while they were en route.) Yishmael the son of Netanya met them on the road, pretending to be in mourning like them, and invited them to detour to see Gedaliah (whom he had already killed). When he had escorted them into the city, he and his followers killed the travelers; they were keeping

a lid on the assassination and preventing word from getting out. Ten men managed to avoid being killed by bribing Yishmael with the grain, oil and honey that they had stored in the fields.

Yishmael took the men he had killed and tossed them into a pit. The pit had been made by King Asa of Judah during his war with Baasa, king of Israel (see I Kings 15). Yishmael captured the people of Mitzpah, killing the men, and enslaving the women and children. Yishmael started to head for Amon, but Yochanan and the other officers found out about what he had done. They took their soldiers and marched on Yishmael's forces. When Yishmael's captives saw the army coming, they rejoiced and returned with Yochanan. Yishmael and eight of his men escaped and ran to Amon for refuge. Yochanan took the refugees to a place called Geirus Chimham, near Bethlehem, because it was on the way to Egypt. They were afraid that Chaldeans would blame everyone for Gedaliah's assassination.

## Chapter 42

### **If You Weren't Going to Listen, Why'd You Ask?**

The armies of Yochanan and the other officers, along with the people they had rescued, approached Jeremiah. They asked him to pray to G-d for them. They were few in number and unsure whether they should remain in Israel or flee to Egypt. Jeremiah agreed to pray to G-d and let them know whatever He replied. The people said that they would faithfully obey whatever instructions they received. Ten days later, G-d spoke to Jeremiah, who gathered Yochanan and the other officers.

G-d had said that if the people remained in the land, He would build them up. They should not fear the wrath of the Babylonians because G-d would protect them, as His wrath had been spent. G-d will have mercy on the people, as would Nebuchadnezzar, who would allow them to return to Jerusalem. But if the people choose to leave the land, fleeing to Egypt under the assumption that it would be safer, that would be against G-d's will.

Jeremiah urged the people to listen to G-d. If they went to Egypt in order to avoid the sword and famine, they would ultimately meet those fates there. This would happen to all who fled to Egypt; they would die by sword, famine or plague, without exception. If they went to Egypt, then G-d would execute the same wrath against them as He had in Jerusalem; they would never return.

Even though they asked Jeremiah to speak to G-d, it was obvious to him that they still planned on going to Egypt. Jeremiah warned the people that if they didn't listen to G-d, it would end in disaster.

## Chapter 43

### **Now You've Done It!**

When Jeremiah finished speaking to the people, he was answered by Azariah the son of Hoshaya, Yochanan, and all the disobedient people. They accused him of giving a false prophecy. They thought that he had been

influenced by his student, Baruch, the result of which would be falling before the army of the Kasdim. So, Yochanan and the others did not listen to G-d's instruction to remain in Israel. They took the people who remained in Judah and went to Egypt. (Jeremiah was with them, possibly taken against his will.)

G-d spoke to Jeremiah in Egypt and told him to take some large stones and put them in the mortar in front of the Pharaoh's palace, in front of everyone. Jeremiah was to proclaim that G-d was sending Nebuchadnezzar, whose throne will be over the place where Jeremiah had put the stones. Nebuchadnezzar was coming to Egypt, where he would mete out death (by famine), captivity and the sword, each person receiving what they deserve. G-d will light a fire in the temples of the Egyptian "gods" and Nebuchadnezzar will burn them and capture them. ("Them" could refer to the idols or to their worshippers.) Nebuchadnezzar would "wrap up" Egypt and then depart. He will break the idols in Heliopolis and burn the temples.

## Chapter 44

### Back to "The Queen of Heaven"

G-d spoke to Jeremiah about the Jews who were living in the various cities in Egypt. G-d said, "You saw what I did to Judah and Jerusalem, which are now uninhabited wastelands. The people provoked Me by worshipping idols. I sent prophets to warn them not to do this, but the people refused to listen. My wrath was therefore poured over Judah and Jerusalem, which are now desolate. After all this, why do they bring destruction upon themselves, to be utterly destroyed? They are once again provoking Me by offering incense to the idols of Egypt. Surely they haven't forgotten all the destruction that was recently caused by similar evil acts! Apparently they did not allow the destruction of Jerusalem to humble them into acting properly. So, I will cut them off. The remnant of Judah who sought refuge in Egypt will be completely wiped out. They will die by the sword and by famine and other nations will refer to them as a lesson. None of them will ever return to Judah - only Jeremiah and Baruch will be spared."

After Jeremiah spoke this prophecy, the people answered him that they still would not obey. They would continue to burn incense to a star they called "the Queen of Heaven" as they did in Judah when times were good (see chapter 7). Since they ceased serving the "Queen of Heaven," things got bad, so they decided to reinstitute her service. Jeremiah replied that their statement was ridiculous; they never stopped their idolatry! They kept it up until G-d punished them severely for it. The people would surely keep on serving idols as they said, therefore G-d will not wait for them to repent and return to Him. Instead, He will simply wipe them out in Egypt, saving only Jeremiah, Baruch and a few other righteous people who were only there under duress. The rest of the people will see how their will stands up against G-d's. G-d then gave a sign so they'd know this was true: He will deliver the Pharaoh into the hands of his enemies, just as Tzidkiyahu fell into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.

## Chapter 45

### Longest and Shortest

Jeremiah started writing the Book that bears his name (or possibly Eicha - Lamentations - see chapter 36) during the reign of King Yehoyakim. At that time, he spoke to his disciple Baruch, sharing a prophecy G-d had spoken about him. Baruch had been pained that he did not attain prophecy himself, as other prophets' students had (e.g. Joshua and Elisha). G-d said that it was because He was about to tear down what He had built - namely the nation and the Temple. There is no need for Baruch to become a prophet, as there will soon be no one for him to whom to prophesy! But despite the evil to come, G-d will protect Baruch wherever he goes. (You will notice that in earlier chapters, we referred to Jeremiah's student as "the prophet Baruch." Indeed, Baruch is listed in the Talmud - Megillah 14b - among the 48 prophets whose words were retained for posterity. So, apparently, he did ultimately accomplish his goal.)

Nach fun fact: The longest Book in Tanach (the Hebrew Bible) is Tehillim - Psalms - at 150 chapters, with Isaiah a distant second at 66 chapters. Jeremiah, however, is the longest book in terms of word count. (Look at your Tanach - Jeremiah is thicker than Psalms!) At five verses, this is the shortest chapter in the longest book. (It is not the shortest in the Bible; Psalm 117 has a mere two verses.)

## Chapter 46

### A Word for Egypt

Starting with this chapter, Jeremiah delivers prophecies regarding the fates of a variety of other nations. In this chapter, he speaks of Egypt.

The army of Egypt prepares for war with Babylonia, but they end up breaking rank and running away in fear. No matter how swift or strong, they will not escape; they will be overcome by the Babylonian forces. Egypt's army used to be like the Nile itself, rising up and flooding the land. Now the army of Nebuchadnezzar has come and the Egyptians are at a loss for what to do. On that day, G-d will take vengeance against those guilty of the murder of King Yoshiyahu (Josiah - see II Chronicles 35). There will be a massacre in the north, where Egypt confronts Nebuchadnezzar.

There is no cure for Egypt's ills. When their army flees, their mighty warriors will crash into one another and both will fall.

G-d spoke to Jeremiah about Babylonia's impending invasion of Egypt. He was to proclaim publicly that they should prepare themselves for the sword. Why are their warriors being swept away? None of them can stand before G-d. Those who originally fled to Egypt for safety would try to return to their homelands (but presumably not be successful in the attempt). They will say that Pharaoh talked big but didn't act when it was time and now it's too late. G-d says that Egypt will be exiled and desolate. Egypt was formerly like a beautiful cow, but now her princes are like fattened calves - useless in the battle. The cry of Egypt will go forth like a snake

and Babylonia will come against them like lumberjacks in the woods. They will chop the Egyptians down because the Babylonians are so numerous.

G-d says that He will take care business with the idol of Alexandria, as well as Pharaoh and the other idols and princes. They will fall into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, but one day the land of Egypt will be populated. (They will never again be a world power, though.)

The few righteous Jews who were dragged to Egypt against their will are told not to fear. They will be redeemed in safety. They are faithful servants and G-d is with them, but He will make an end of the nations where they have been exiled. The Jewish nation will be chastised, but never completely destroyed.

The Pharaoh of this chapter is called "Pharaoh Neco," which the Targum Yonason translates as "Pharaoh the lame." Why was this Pharaoh lame? A well-known Midrash says that King Solomon's throne was adorned with a variety of mechanical animals. When this Pharaoh had King Yoshiyahu killed, he confiscated Solomon's throne from the palace. Not knowing how to operate it, he was wounded by a mechanical lion (Leviticus Rabbah 20:1, et al).

## Chapter 47

### **Smiting the Philistines**

G-d spoke to Jeremiah regarding the Philistines; this prophecy was given in the time of King Tzidkiyahu, before Pharaoh invaded Gaza.

Water (symbolizing the Chaldean army) is coming from the north and will flood the land and its people. The inhabitants of the land of Philistia will cry out. The noise from the horses and chariots will be so overwhelming that fathers won't even be able to turn to save their sons. The day is coming when the Philistines will be plundered, cutting off those who would otherwise assist them. G-d will allow Philistia to be plundered, as well as their homeland of Kaftor.

Gaza is "plucked bald" and Ashkelon has been laid waste; how long will they tear their flesh in mourning? How can the metaphorical "sword of G-d" be still when He has commanded it to battle? G-d has sent it against Ashkelon and the coast.

That the Philistines are not indigenous to Israel is explicit in Amos 9:7. Their native land of Kaftor is generally accepted to be the island of Crete, although some say it is Cappadocia in Asia Minor (in modern-day Turkey).

## Chapter 48

### **Moav Gets Theirs**

G-d told Jeremiah what would be the fate of Moav. Woe to the Moabite cities of N'vo, Kiryasayim and Misgav, which have been destroyed. In Cheshbon, they plotted to overthrow the nation and Madmein will also be a

waste. A cry will go up from Choronyim; Moav is destroyed. They will go up to Luchis, a mountain, crying and when they go down to Choronyim, their enemies will hear them wailing. If they run away, they can save their lives! They will then be like a tower (or perhaps a tree) standing tall in the desert. The Moabites put too much faith in their material possessions, which is why they will be taken captive. Not only will their idol Chemosh be unable to save them, it will be carried off, as well.

The invaders will loot every city, the valleys and the plains. Let the Moabites run away, because their cities will be ruined and empty. This is a punishment from G-d and those who do not do His will shall be cursed. Moav had it easy for a long time, dwelling securely in their land; now they will be exiled. The day is coming when G-d will send people to pour Moav out of their land, like wine from a jug, which is emptied then smashed. Moav will be as ashamed of having worshipped the idol Chemosh as Israel was for worshipping the golden calf that Yeravam set up in Beth-El. (This does not refer to the Golden Calf after the Exodus from Egypt; this one was in the Book of Kings.) How can the Moabites continue to claim that they are such mighty warriors, when they have been so soundly defeated? Their destruction is imminent and their own evil has caused it.

Neighboring countries will mourn over Moav's fate. The Moabites will sit in their exile and long for good things. The people of Aroer will stand by the road as Moav is exiled and they will ask the Moabites what happened. The Moabites are shamed and they will tell in Arnon (a neighboring country) how Moav was destroyed.

The horn (referring to the royalty) has been cut off of Moav; the arm of Moav (referring to the officers and soldiers) has been broken. Moav will drink from the cup of G-d's wrath and become drunk; they will wallow in their own filth and be a source of derision for other nations. As Moav mocked Israel, who did nothing to deserve it, they will be mocked by others.

The people of Moav will leave their cities and conceal themselves among the rocks. The other nations heard Moav's arrogant boasts during the times of wealth and security. But they hated Israel for no reason and did not deal properly with the nation whose ancestor (Abraham) saved their ancestor (Lot).

Jeremiah cries for the way Moav is humbled. Rejoicing will be taken from the fields of Moav and wine will cease from their cisterns. No one will tread grapes with cheers, as they used to. Not only will rejoicing cease from Moav, they will no longer be able to serve their idols and offer sacrifices to them. Jeremiah feels for Moav because of their plight; everyone is in mourning. Wailing is everywhere and the nation is like a broken, useless utensil.

G-d said that Moav's enemies would come swiftly upon them. Moav's mighty warriors have become like heart-broken women. They will cease to be a nation because they opposed G-d. They will flee in fright, pits and traps waiting to capture them; whoever escapes the pit will fall into the trap.

A fire goes forth from the Moabite cities of Cheshbon and Sichon, consuming the nation and its leadership. The nation that worshipped the idol Chemosh is lost, their children are captives. But the exiles of Moav will return in the "end of days" (i.e., the Messianic era).

## Chapter 49

### The Fates of Amon, Edom and Others

Next, G-d spoke to Jeremiah about the fate of Amon. Does Israel have no heirs? Why has Amon, the nation that worships the idol Malkam, taken possession of the territory of the Tribe Gad? The day is coming that the call of war will be upon Amon. They will be burned with fire and Israel will reclaim their territories. Amon will cry because they are ruined. They will mourn and run around in groups seeking refuge because they and their idol are going into exile.

Amon boasts of their lush valleys, but those valleys have been ruined. G-d will bring terror upon Amon and they will be driven from their homes, but no one will take them in. Later, as with Moav, they will return.

G-d then spoke to Jeremiah regarding Edom. Is there no more wisdom to be found? Run away! Edom will inherit the woes of their ancestor Esau. Don't the owners of vineyards leave over grapes for the poor? Don't even thieves take what they want and leave the rest? But Edom's spoilers left nothing. The nation is exposed and laid bare; there is no place to hide.

When Israel is exiled, they will leave orphans and widows behind. Edom will be so thoroughly destroyed that who will care for the orphans and widows won't be a problem, since there won't be any. G-d said that Edom deserved to drink from the cup of His wrath (see chapter 25). G-d swears by Himself that Batzrah, a city in Moav, will be destroyed and all they did was provide a king for Edom! A messenger will be sent among the nations, telling them to go to war against Batzrah.

Edom has been humbled among the nations. Their haste encouraged them in their battles. If they were elevated like the nest of an eagle, G-d will "bring them back down to Earth." They will be desolate and other nations will shake their heads at them. Like Sodom and Gemorrah after their fall, no one will live there.

Like a lion that goes up from the Jordan to a secure place, G-d will bring the time when He takes Israel out of Edom, where they will be exiled. There is no one like G-d who can oppose Him. So listen to G-d, Who revealed to Jeremiah His plans regarding Edom.

Edom will fall to Persia, descended from Yefes (Japheth), the youngest of Noah's sons. When Edom falls, the sound will make the Earth shake; it will be heard in the Red Sea. The enemy will soar over Batzrah like an eagle and the hearts of Edom will become faint. The cities of Aram are ashamed because they heard of the siege of Damascus, their capital, by the Chaldeans. Their worry is like the churning sea, which cannot be stilled.

Damascus has weakened; she turns to run from her enemies, but is paralyzed with fear. The city is not spared by the invaders despite its great beauty. All of her young men and warriors are destroyed in one fell swoop. G-d will light a fire in Damascus, which will consume the king of Aram.

Next, G-d disclosed the fates of Keidar and Chatzor, which were struck only by Nebuchadnezzar. G-d said to go to Keidar for the spoils of war; the people of Keidar had little, but what they had was left to be plundered. The people of Keidar are told to flee; since they were not engaged in a war, they were not on guard against other nations. They will be scattered in all directions. Meanwhile, Chatzor will become a home for jackals, forever uninhabited by man.



At the start of King Tzidkiyahu's reign, G-d spoke to Jeremiah about Elam. G-d said that He would "break the bow" of Elam, whose army was primarily archers. Four kingdoms will come upon them like winds from the four directions, scattering them. There will be no nation that does not include refugees from the nation of Elam. G-d will send the sword after them until they are thoroughly eradicated. G-d will follow Elam into exile, in order to eradicate them. But, in the "end of days," their remnant will also be restored.

## Chapter 50

### Payback Time

G-d spoke to Jeremiah about the fate of Babylonia. Tell all the nations of the fall of Babylonia; their idols Bel and Merodach have been overthrown. Persia and Media will conquer Babylonia, doing to them as they did to so many others. When this happens, the refugees of Israel and Judah will cry (presumably with joy) as they return from exile and seek G-d. They will give each other directions back to their land and they will encourage one another to join with G-d in an eternal covenant. The people were like lost sheep, whose shepherds (the kings) led them astray. They were consumed by their enemies, who absolved themselves of any responsibility, saying that the Jews were punished for disobeying G-d. The Jews will walk out of Babylonia without fear or hesitation.

Babylonia will be attacked by a consortium of nations, who will fire arrows at them with great accuracy. The land of the Chaldeans will be plundered, satisfying the invaders. Just as the Babylonians rejoiced when they conquered nations, other will rejoice in subduing them. The start of Babylonia was great, but their end will be the desert. Because they rebelled against G-d, Babylonia will become desolate. The attacking armies will surround the Babylonians, casting stones, firing arrows, and shouting to create chaos in their ranks; it's payback time.

The Babylonian farmer, who wields a sickle, will be cut off from the land. (This may be a metaphor for the Babylonian king, who wields a sword.) All of the exiles living under Babylonian dominion will run to their homelands. The people of Israel are like sheep, scattered by attacking lions, Assyria and Babylonia. G-d will repay Babylonia for their evil as he did to Assyria. The Jews will return to the land of Israel and their sins will be forgiven and forgotten.

G-d tells Cyrus (who was foretold by Isaiah in chapters 44-45 of that prophet's Book) to march against Babylonia. Babylonia, the hammer that shattered the rest of the world, is now broken itself. G-d opened up His armory and took out the weapons He would use against them. The Babylonians will end up being threshed like grain.

The Jewish refugees who will flee from Babylonia (in the time of Darius) will tell of G-d's vengeance. The Babylonians will be repaid for their deeds, their youths and warriors falling in battle. G-d opposes evil people; He will cause them to fall and there will be nobody to pick them up.

The people of Israel and Judah were taken hostage; now G-d will redeem them. The world will finally rest and have peace, except for Babylonia. The sword is coming upon the Babylonians, the Chaldeans, their officers and sorcerers, their horses and chariots, and any allies among them. Their treasuries will be emptied and their water will dry up because they are a land of idolatry. Animals will inhabit the ruins of their buildings and those cities will never be inhabited again, like Sodom and Gemorrah.

The Persians and Medes are coming for the Babylonians from the north, as are Darius and Cyrus from the east. They will have no mercy on them. Belshazzar, then king of Babylonia, will be unable to defend against them.

When G-d brings this about, no one will be able to prevent it because nobody can thwart His will. So heed the plan of G-d regarding Babylonia, who will be conquered by the youngest. (Persia is descended from the youngest of the sons of Japheth, as we mentioned in the previous chapter.) The world will tremble when they hear the fate of Babylonia.

## Chapter 51

### Until Here, Jeremiah Speaks of Babylon(ia)

G-d said that he would arouse the antagonism of Persia and Media against Babylonia and "Lev Kamai." ("Lev Kamai" is "Kasdim" - Chaldea - in At-Bash, the cipher in which the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is exchanged with the last letter, the second with the next-to-last, etc. Why refer to Kasdim as "Lev Kamai?" Aside from the At-Bash, it means, "the heart of my enemies.") G-d will send invaders to disperse the Babylonians and empty the land. G-d will send the archers and their armor will not protect them; they will fall in the streets.

Israel has not been forsaken by G-d; the Chaldeans will be held responsible for what they have done. Foreigners visiting Babylonia are encouraged to flee, rather than be caught up in her punishment. Babylonia is compared to a cup in G-d's hand from which the nations of the world all drank. Now, G-d has dropped that cup and it shatters. Leave them and return to your own lands! G-d has recalled the merits of the Forefathers and the Jews have been redeemed, so they will praise him in Jerusalem.

Get the arrows ready because G-d is preparing Persia and Media against Babylonia, who destroyed His Temple. The conquerors will raise their flag over Babylon and position guards around the city, to fulfill that which G-d has decreed. The end has come for that wealthy nation, because of their acts of violence. G-d swears by Himself to bring swarms of enemy soldiers against them like locusts.

With His strength and His wisdom, G-d made the Heavens and the Earth. He made the water cycle, the lightning and the wind. People are foolish and insignificant creatures, who easily go astray from their Maker. They turn to idols and will perish for it. Israel worships G-d, Who created everything.

G-d says that Babylonia was his weapon, which was used to strike the nations of the world, but now they must be paid for their own evil deeds. G-d opposes Babylonia; He stretches out His hand to topple them. Signal the troops of the various nations against them! The Earth itself felt weak because of G-d's plans for Babylonia.

The mighty Babylonian warriors stopped fighting and sequestered themselves in fortresses. The messengers pass one another as they all come to tell the king of Babylon news of the city's conquest. G-d says that Babylonia is like grain being threshed and it's almost harvest time!

Israel laments how Nebuchadnezzar has crushed them and emptied out the land - now it will happen to his country! G-d says that He will take up Israel's cause in this matter, emptying Babylonia of their riches, until the land has become a home for jackals, rather than people. G-d will make their festivals during hot weather; they will become drunk and fall asleep, never to awaken. (Rashi refers us to events in Daniel chapter 5 for the fulfillment of this prophecy, when Belshazzar drinks wine and is slain.) The Babylonians will be lambs to the slaughter; a huge army will overwhelm them, like the waves of the sea. G-d will destroy their idol Bel and release the nations that were taken in its name.

Israel should flee from Babylonia to avoid G-d's wrath there. The land will be full of rumors and constantly-changing monarchs. The idols of Babylonia will fall and the land will be conquered by the Persians and Medes. What Babylonia did to Israel will be done to them. G-d tells the exiles from Israel to remember G-d and to focus on Jerusalem. They have been disgraced by what invaders did to the Temple, but G-d will enact justice on them and their idols. Even if Babylonia erects mighty fortresses that reach the sky, G-d will still send Darius and Cyrus to destroy them. A cry comes from Babylonia because of the destruction G-d brings upon them. The walls of Babylon will be toppled and their gates will be burned; the people will strive unsuccessfully to save themselves.

Jeremiah gave instructions to Seraya, brother of Baruch, when he was exiled with Tzidkiyahu. Jeremiah wrote down the prophecy of evil to befall Babylonia in one scroll and told Seraya to read it when he got to Babylonia. When he finished reading it, Seraya was to tie a stone to it and toss it in the Euphrates saying, "Babylonia will sink and not rise because of what G-d will do them."

The chapter ends, "Until here are the words of Jeremiah," but there's still one chapter left in the Book! What are we to make of that? There are several explanations offered, but we'll share just one, from the Radak: chapter 52 is strictly narrative. When it says that through chapter 51 are the words of Jeremiah, it means the prophetic words. After the conclusion of telling the fate of Babylonia, Jeremiah had no further prophecies.

Astute readers will note that in these synopses, we typically speak of "Babylonia," but in this chapter we mention "Babylon" a few times. Babylonia was the name of the nation; Babylon was the capital city.

## Chapter 52

### The Exile to Babylonia

Tzidkiyahu became king of Judah when he was 21 years old. He did acts of evil like his predecessor Yehoyakim had done. G-d inspired him to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar, who had placed him on the throne, which led to Tzidkiyahu's exile. In the ninth year of Tzidkiyahu's reign, on the tenth day of the month of Teves, Nebuchadnezzar's army started the siege of Jerusalem. The siege lasted two years, until the famine was so severe that there was no food left. The city was breached and the soldiers fled from the Chaldeans.

The Chaldeans pursued and overtook Tzidkiyahu in Jericho. They brought him to Nebuchadnezzar, to account for his rebellion. Nebuchadnezzar slaughtered Tzidkiyahu's sons in his presence, then blinded him. He had Tzidkiyahu bound in chains and brought to Babylonia, where he was thrown in prison. On the Ninth of Av, Nebuchadnezzar's deputy, Nebuzaradan, burned the Temple and the king's palace in Jerusalem.

Nebuzaradan exiled some of the poor people who remained in Jerusalem, those who had already defected, and the people remaining in the other cities of Judah. But Nebuzaradan left some of the poor people behind to work the land.

The Chaldeans broke the copper pillars of the Temple, the stands and the copper "sea," and the Temple utensils and instruments, carrying off the copper to Babylonia. They also took the silver and gold utensils. Nebuzaradan took Seraya and Tzefanya, the High Priest and the Deputy High Priest, into custody, along with their officers. From the city, Nebuzaradan took a variety of officers of the court and the army. He brought them to Nebuchadnezzar, who executed them.

In the initial wave of Babylonia's attack, in the reign of Yehoyachin, 3,023 people were exiled from Judah; in the second wave, at the time of Tzidkiyahu, an additional 832 people were exiled from Jerusalem. Nebuzaradan exiled an additional 745 more people.

When Nebuchadnezzar died, his successor, Evil-Merodach, released Yehoyachin from prison. He placed Yehoyachin over other captive kings who were in Babylonia. Yehoyachin resumed wearing regular clothes instead of his prison uniform and started eating his meals with Evil-Merodach; Yehoyachin received his meals from the king of Babylonia for the rest of his life.