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Dr Maurice M. Mizrahi
Congregation Adat Reyim
Joint series on Jeremiah with Beth El Hebrew Congregation

The Prophet Jeremiah in the Talmud and Midrash

Chronology

640-609 BCE: Josiah [Yoshiyahu], King of Judah. Marched against Pharaoh Necho and was killed at Megiddo. Strong religious reforms, restoration of Jewish practices, Temple-centered.

626-585 BCE: Jeremiah's [Yirmiah] 41 years of prophecy. Torn between love of Jews and love of Judaism.

609 BCE: Jehoahaz, son of Josiah, King of Judah. 3-month reign, died in exile in Egypt.

609-598 BCE: Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, King of Judah. Died during siege of Jerusalem. Burned scroll of Lamentations. Return of idolatry and corruption.

598 BCE: Jeconiah [Jehoiachin], son of Jehoiakim, King of Judah. Was 18, reigned 3 months, exiled to Babylon.

598-587 BCE: Zedekiah [Tzidkiyahu], son of Josiah, last king of Judah. Was 21 when began reign, exiled to Babylon.

589-586 BCE: Siege and sack of Jerusalem, destruction of Temple and exile to Babylon

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Authorship

Jeremiah wrote the books of Jeremiah, Kings, and Lamentations (Talmud)

Moses received the Torah from God and wrote the Book of Job, Joshua wrote his book and the last eight verses of Deuteronomy (that is, the account of the death of Moses); Samuel wrote his book, Judges and Ruth; David wrote the Psalms; Jeremiah wrote his book, the Book of Kings and Lamentations; Hezekiah and his council wrote Isaiah, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes; the men of the Great Assembly wrote Ezekiel, the Twelve Prophets, Daniel, and the Scroll of Esther; Ezra wrote his book and the genealogy of Chronicles down to himself. [Talmud, Bava Batra 14b-15a].

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Dreams

Talmud, Berachot 57b. Our Rabbis taught:

There are three kings [who are important for dreams]:

If one sees David in a dream, he may hope for piety;

if Solomon, he may hope for wisdom;

if Ahab, let him fear for punishment.

There are three prophets [of significance for dreams]:

If one sees the Book of Kings, he may look forward to greatness;

if Ezekiel, he may look forward to wisdom;

if Isaiah he may look forward to consolation;

if Jeremiah, let him fear for punishment.

There are three larger books of the Writings [which are significant for dreams]:

If one sees the Book of Psalms, he may hope for piety;
if the Book of Proverbs, he may hope for wisdom;
if the Book of Job, let him fear for punishment.

There are three smaller books of the Writings [significant for dreams]:

If one sees the Songs of Songs in a dream, he may hope for piety; [It will implant love of God]
if Ecclesiastes, he may hope for wisdom;
if Lamentations, let him fear for punishment;
and one who sees the Scroll of Esther will have a miracle wrought for him.

There are three Sages [significant for dreams]:

If one sees Rabbi in a dream, he may hope for wisdom;
if Eleazar b. Azariah, he may hope for riches; [he was very rich]
if R. Ishmael b. Elisha, let him fear for punishment. [He was martyred by Romans]

There are three disciples [significant for dreams]: (they became authorities though they were never ordained)

If one sees Ben Azzai in a dream, he may hope for piety;
if Ben Zoma, he may hope for wisdom;
if Aher [Elisha ben Avuyah], let him fear for punishment.

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Tidbits

-Jeremiah was descended from Joshua and the proselyte Rahab (Meg. 14b).

-He was born circumcised (Avot de Rabbi Natan 1 2, 12)

-As a newborn he spoke in the voice of a youth and rebuked his mother for her unfaithfulness. He explained to his astonished mother that he was really rebuking the inhabitants of Zion and Jerusalem (Pesikta Rabbati 26:129).

-The people mocked him, saying that, as a descendant of the proselyte Rahab, he had no right to reprimand them (Pesikta de Rav Kahane 115)

-They maliciously accused him of illegal sexual relations (Bava Kamma 16b)

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God's power

Talmud, Yoma 69b

...Moses came and said: 'God is great, mighty, and awesome' (Deut. 30:17). Then Jeremiah came and said: Aliens are destroying His Temple. Where are, then, His awesome deeds? Hence he omitted [the attribute] 'awesome' [in Jer. 32:17ff:

17. Ah Lord God! behold, you have made the heaven and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched, and there is nothing too hard for you;

18. You show lovingkindness to thousands... *****O great and mighty God*****, the Lord of hosts, is his name...

21. And have brought forth your people Israel out of the land of Egypt...

22. And you have given them this land...

23. And they came in, and possessed it; but they obeyed not your voice, nor walked in your Torah; they have done nothing of all that you commanded them to do; therefore you have caused all this evil to come upon them...]

But how could [Jeremiah] abolish something established by Moses?

R. Eleazar said: Since they knew that the Holy One, blessed be He, insists on truth, [Jeremiah] would not ascribe false [things] to Him. [Since to them the circumstances indicated that God desired to hide His "awesome deeds".]

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King Josiah marched against Pharaoh Necho and was killed at Megiddo.

Talmud, Taanit 22b

And the archers shot at king Josiah... R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in the name of R. Jonathan: Josiah was punished because he should have consulted Jeremiah and he did not.

On what did Josiah rely? On the divine promise contained in the words, 'Neither shall the sword go through your land' (Lev. 26:6). What sword? Is it the warring sword? It is already stated [in the same verse], 'And I will give peace in the land'. It must surely refer to the peaceful sword.

Josiah, however, did not know that his generation found little favor [in the eyes of God].

When he was dying Jeremiah observed that his lips were moving and he feared that perhaps, Heaven forbid, [Josiah] was saying something improper because of his great pain; he thereupon bent down and he overheard him justifying [God's] decree against himself saying, 'The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against His word' (Lam. 1:18). He [Jeremiah] then cited of him, 'The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord' (Lam. 4:20).

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Restrictions on Tish'a B'Av

Talmud, Taanit 30a

Our Rabbis have taught: All the restrictions that apply to the mourner hold equally good on Tish'a B'Av. Eating, drinking, bathing, anointing, wearing shoes and having sex are forbidden. It is also forbidden to

read the Tanach or to study Mishnah, Talmud, Midrash, Halacha, or Aggada. He may, however, -read such parts of Scripture which he does not usually read and study such parts of Mishnah which he usually does not study [because of pain of effort to study something new].

-He may also read Lamentations, Job and the sad parts of Jeremiah; and

-the school children are free from school for it is said, The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. [pain due to denial of rejoicing]

[The Sages say that the Messiah will be born on Tisha B'av.]

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Hulda and the scroll

2Kings 22:14 says that in the days of King Josiah, a Torah scroll is discovered in the Temple, not turned to its appropriate place, but rather to the text of curses in Deut. 28:36, which describes G-d leading Israel

and its king into exile. The king sends the High Priest and other notables to ask Hulda the Prophetess about this ominous sign. [That it was Deut. is not traditional teaching.]

Talmud, Megillah 14b

[They sent for] Hulda [the prophetess] (II Kings 22:14).

But if Jeremiah was there, how could she prophesy? It was said in the school of Rab in the name of Rab: Hulda was a [distant cousin] of Jeremiah [through Joshua and Rahab], and he did not object to her doing so.

But how could [King] Josiah himself pass over Jeremiah and send to her? The members of the school of R. Shila replied, 'Because women are compassionate.' [She might deliver a kinder message.]

R. Johanan said: Jeremiah was not there, as he had gone to bring back the ten tribes.

Hulda's message:

2 Kings 22:15. And she said to them, Tell the man that sent you to me, Thus said the Lord... I will bring evil upon this place, and upon its inhabitants, all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read;...

17. Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense to other gods...therefore my anger shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched.

18. But to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall you say to him...

19. Because your heart was tender, and you have humbled yourself before the Lord...and have torn your clothes, and wept before me

20. ...you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place.

(According to tradition, Jeremiah restored the ten tribes in the 18th year of King Josiah. With their return began the counting of a new jubilee cycle to mark the renewed observance of the laws of the Year of Release and Jubilee which had fallen into disuse while the Northern Kingdom was in exile. The Temple was destroyed 36 years later, so that the '14th year after that, the city was smitten' fell in the jubilee year.)

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Lamentations 1

1. How lonely sits the city, that was full of people! she has become like a widow! She that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, has become a vassal!

2. She weeps bitterly in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has none to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies.

3. Judah has gone into exile because of affliction, and because of great servitude; she dwells among the nations, she finds no rest; all her pursuers overtook her in the midst of her distress.

4. The roads to Zion mourn, because none come to the appointed feasts; all her gates are desolate; her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness.

5. Her adversaries have become the chief, her enemies prosper; for the Lord has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions; her infants have gone to captivity before the enemy.

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The burning of *Lamentations* by King Jehoiakim of Judah

Talmud, Moed Katan 26a

[One must] rent [one's clothes] when a scroll of the law has been burnt. What is the source for this? What is written (Jer. 36:23ff): 'And it came to pass when Jehudi had read three or four columns that he cut it with a penknife and cast it into the fire that was in the brazier. What is the point of saying '[had read] three or four columns'? They told the king that Jeremiah had written a book of Lamentations, [and] he said to them: What is written there?

[They quoted] How lonely sits the city. [The King] replied: I am the King. [There is nothing in that verse about the King himself, but only lamentations about the city of Jerusalem]

They then cited to him [the second verse]: She weeps bitterly in the night. He replied [again]: I am the King.

[They then cited the third verse]: Judah is gone into exile because of affliction. [Again he replied]: I am the King.

[They continued with verse four]: The roads to Zion mourn. I am the King [he replied].

[They continued with the fifth verse]: Her adversaries have become the chief. He asked: Who said that?

[They continued with that same verse]: for the Lord has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions.

Forthwith he [began to] cut out all the names of God mentioned [in the scroll] and burned them in the fire; hence it is written [in Jer. 36:24]: 'Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the King, nor any of his servants that heard all these words', which implies that the [bystanders] should have rent [their clothes]. Said Abaye to R. Papa: Might it not be suggested that the reason [why they should have rent their clothes was] for hearing evil tidings? [And not for blasphemy.] He replied: [Hardly, for] were there at that time any evil tidings as yet?

Jeremiah 36

25. [they] pleaded with the king not to burn the scroll; but he would not hear them.

26. And the king commanded... [them] to take Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet; but the Lord hid them.

27. And the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah...

29. ...you shall say to Jehoiakim king of Judah...

31. I will bring... upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them. But they did not listen.

32. Then Jeremiah took another scroll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe...who wrote in there from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the scroll which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire; and there were added to them many similar words.

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Don't flatter. Jeremiah flattered and was punished.

Talmud, Sotah 41b-42a

R. Eleazar also said: Even the embryos in their mother's wombs curse [the flatterer]; as it is said: 'He who tells the wicked, You are righteous, people shall curse him, nations shall abhor him' [Prov. 24:24] ...Le'om [nation] means ...embryo, as it is said: And the one le'om [nation] shall be stronger than the other nation (Gen. 25:23 -- Jacob and Esau).

R. Eleazar also said: Every flatterer will fall into Gehinnom; as it is said: 'Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil', etc. (Isa. 5:20). What is written after that? 'Therefore as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as the dry grass sinks down in the flame', etc. (Isa. 5:24).

R. Eleazar also said: 'Whoever flatters his neighbor will in the end fall into his hand; if he does not fall into his hand, he will fall into the hand of his sons; and if he does not fall into the hands of his sons, he will fall into the hand of his grandsons; as it is stated:

'And Jeremiah said to Hananiah, "Amen; the Lord do so; the Lord perform your words"', (Jer. 28:6) and [as] it is [later] written, 'And when he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the ward was there, whose

name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah*, and he laid hold on Jeremiah the prophet, saying: You defected to the Chaldeans. Then said Jeremiah, It is false, I did not defect to the Chaldeans', etc., [Jer. 37:13] and it continues, 'So he laid hold on Jeremiah and brought him to the princes.'

R. Eleazar also said: Any community in which there is flattery is as repulsive as a menstruant woman; as it is said: 'For the community of flatterers is galmud' [Job 15:34] and in over-sea towns they call a menstruant woman galmudah. What is the meaning of galmudah? She is separated [gemulah da] from her husband.

R. Eleazar also said: Any community in which there is flattery will finally go into exile. It is written here, For the community of flatterers is galmud, and elsewhere it is written: 'Then you will say in your heart, Who has gotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am solitary [galmudah], in exile, and wandering to and fro' etc. [Isa. 49:21]

R. Jeremiah b. Abba said: Four classes will not receive the presence of the Shechinah: scoffers, flatterers, liars, and slanderers.

[*The captain was the grandson of Hananiah. Hananiah was a false prophet. He said the captivity would last 2 years, not 70, and the king of Judah, Jeconiah, would come back, not die in captivity. Jeremiah accommodated him [bad] even though he still offered his bleaker prophecy [good]:]

Jeremiah 28

1. And it came to pass the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, and in the fifth month, that Hananiah the son of Azur the prophet, who was of Gibeon, spoke to me in the house of the Lord, in the presence of the priests and of all the people, saying,
2. Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon.
3. Within two full years will I bring again to this place all the utensils of the Lord's house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place, and carried to Babylon;
4. And I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah, who went to Babylon, says the Lord; for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.
5. Then the prophet Jeremiah said to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests, and in the presence of all the people who stood in the house of the Lord,
6. The prophet Jeremiah said, Amen; the Lord do so; the Lord perform your words which you have prophesied, to bring back the utensils of the Lord's house, and all who were carried away captive, from Babylon to this place.
7. Nevertheless hear now this word that I speak in your ears, and in the ears of all the people;
8. The prophets that have been before me and before you of old prophesied both against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence.
9. As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet shall come to pass, then shall it be known that the Lord has truly sent that prophet.
10. Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke from off the prophet Jeremiah's neck, and broke it.
11. And Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people, saying, Thus says the Lord; So will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all nations within the period of two full years. And the prophet Jeremiah went his way.
12. Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, after Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke from off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, saying,
13. Go and tell Hananiah, saying, Thus says the Lord; You have broken the yokes of wood; but you shall make for them yokes of iron.
14. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; I have put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him; and I have given him the beasts of the field also.

15. Then said the prophet Jeremiah to Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; The Lord has not sent you; but you make this people trust in a lie.
16. Therefore thus says the Lord; Behold, I will cast you from off the face of the earth; this year you shall die, because you have uttered rebellion against the Lord.
17. So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month.

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A sad story

Talmud, Gittin 58a

Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: It is related that the son and the daughter of R. Ishmael b. Elisha were carried off [and sold to] two masters. Some time after, the two [masters] met, and one said, I have a slave, the most beautiful in the world. The other said, I have a female slave, the most beautiful in the world. They said: Let us marry them to one another and share the children. They put them in the same room. The boy sat in one corner and the girl in another. He said: I am a priest descended from high priests, and shall I marry a bondwoman? She said: I am a priestess descended from high priests, and shall I be married to a slave? So they passed all the night in tears. When the day dawned they recognized one another and fell on one another's necks and bemoaned themselves with tears until their souls departed. For them Jeremiah utters lamentation, 'For these things I weep; my eye, my eye runs down with water' (Lam. 1:16).

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Framing Jeremiah

Talmud, Baba Kama 16b

Regarding Jeremiah it is stated:] 'For they have dug a pit to take me, and laid snares for my feet'(Jer. 18:22).

R. Eleazar said: They maliciously accused him of [having illicit intercourse with] a harlot.

But R. Samuel b. Nahmani said: They maliciously accused him of having [immoral connections with] another man's wife.

No difficulty arises if we accept the view that the accusation was concerning a harlot, since it is written:

'For a harlot is a deep pit' (Prov. 23:27) But according to the view that the accusation was concerning another man's wife, how is this expressed in the term pit [employed in Jeremiah's complaint]? Is then another man's wife [when committing adultery] excluded from the general term of harlot

[On the other hand] there is no difficulty on the view that the accusation was concerning another man's wife, for Scripture immediately afterwards says: 'Yet, Lord, you know all their counsel against me to slay me' (Jer. 18:23) [and the penalty for adultery is death]; but according to the view that the accusation was concerning a harlot, how did they thereby intend to slay him? [since no death penalty is attached to that sin] [This they did] by throwing him into a pit of mire (Jer. 38:6).

Raba gave the following exposition: What is the meaning of the concluding verse: 'But let them be overthrown before You; deal thus with them in the time of Your anger'? (Jer. 18:23) Jeremiah thus addressed the Holy One, blessed be He: Lord of the Universe, even when they are prepared to perform charitable deeds, cause them to perform them on people unworthy of any consideration, so that no reward come to them for that charity.

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Torah study protects Israel

Midrash - Lamentations Rabbah Prologue 2

R. Abba b. Kahana opened his discourse with the text, 'Who is the wise man, that he may understand this?... 'Why has the land perished?' (Jer. 9:11). R. Simeon b. Yohai taught: If you see cities uprooted from their site in the land of Israel, know that the inhabitants failed to pay the fees of the instructors in Torah and Mishnah; as it is said, 'Why has the land perished?...' And the Lord says: 'Because they have forsaken My law' (Jer. 9:12)

Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi, compiler of Mishna] sent R. Assi and R. Ammi on a mission to organize [religious education in] the cities of the land of Israel. They came to a city and said to the people, Bring us the guardians of the city. They fetched the captain of the guard and the magistrate. The rabbis exclaimed, 'These the guardians of the city? They are its destroyers!' [i.e., If you rely solely upon them the city will certainly be destroyed.] The people inquired, "Who, then, are its guardians?" and they answered, "The instructors in Torah and Mishnah, who meditate upon, teach and preserve the Torah day and night." This is in accordance with what is said, 'You shall meditate [on the Torah] day and night (Joshua 1:8); and it is similarly stated, 'Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain (Ps. 127:1). [i.e., unless the house is built on the basis of education in and observance it will not endure.]

R. Huna and R. Jeremiah said in the name of R. Samuel b. R. Isaac: We find that the Holy One, blessed be He, may overlook idolatry, sexual transgressions, or murder, but He does not overlook rejection of the Torah; as it is said, "Why has the land perished?" It is not written here "because of idolatry, sexual transgressions, or murder", but "because they have forsaken My law".

[What distinction is made here? Sinning by neglecting a mitzvah vs rejecting the Torah in full.]

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Belief vs action

Midrash - Lamentations Rabbah Prologue 2

R. Huna and R. Jeremiah said in the name of R. Hiyya b. Abba: It is written, 'They have forsaken Me and have not kept My law' (Jer. 16:11) . This means: Would that they had forsaken Me but kept My law, since by occupying themselves with it, the light it contains would have led them back to the right path.

-Not a repetition, but two different things:

- 1) They have forsaken Me (they don't believe in me) and
- 2) They have not kept My law.

God is saying the first (belief) is less important than the second (action).

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'Echah yashvah vadad = How lonely sits' -- leitmotif in the midrash

How lonely sits the city, that was full of people! she has become like a widow! (Lam. 1:1)
Echah yashvah vadad ha3ir, rabbati 3am, hayta k'almanah! (Lam. 1:1)

Midrash - Lamentations Rabbah Prologue 2

R. Simeon b. Lakish said: God may be likened to a king who had two sons. He became enraged against the first of them, took a stick, and thrashed him so that he writhed in agony and died; and the father then began to lament over him. He later became enraged against the second son, took a stick, and thrashed him so that he writhed in agony and died;

and the father then exclaimed, "No longer have I the strength to lament over them, so call for the mourning women* and let them lament over them."

Similarly the ten tribes were exiled, and He began to lament over them, "'Hear you this word which I take up against you, a lamentation, O house of Israel" (Amos 5:1).

But when Judah and Benjamin were exiled, the Holy One, blessed be He -- if it is possible to say so* -- declared, "No longer have I the strength to lament over them." Hence it is written, 'Call for the mourning women... and let them make haste, and take up a wailing for Us [‘that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters’] (Jer. 9:16-17).

It is not written here "for them", but "for Us", i.e. for Me and them. "That Our eyes may run down with tears"--it is not written here "that their eyes may run down with tears", but "Our eyes", i.e. Mine and theirs. It is not written here, "And their eyelids gush out with water", but "Our eyelids", i.e. Mine and theirs.

*Professional mourners hired in the East at funerals.

The Rabbis say: God may be likened to a king who had twelve sons of whom two died. He began to console himself with the ten. Two more died and he began to console himself with the eight. Two more died and he began to console himself with the six. Two more died and he began to console himself with the four. Two more died and he began to console himself with the two. But when they had all died, he began to lament over them, "' How lonely sits..." (Lam. 1:1).

*If it is possible to say so': Can we bless God under these circumstances?

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Only when God leaves me am I lonely

Midrash - Lamentations Rabbah Prologue 3

R. Abba b. Kahana opened his discourse with the text, "I sat not in the assembly of the merry makers, nor rejoiced; [I sat alone because of your hand]" (Jer. 15:17). The Community of Israel spoke before the Holy One, blessed be He: 'Sovereign of the Universe, never did I enter the theatres and circuses¹ of the heathen peoples and make merry and rejoice. 'I sat alone because of Your hand. Pharaoh's hand attacked me, but I sat not alone.'² Sennacherib's hand attacked me, but I sat not alone. Since, however, Your hand attacked me, I sat alone. "How lonely sits..."³

1. Sins of naked people, grossness, and cruelty
2. God was with me
3. I.e. only when God forsook me could my enemies make me desolate.

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Adam and Israel

Midrash - Lamentations Rabbah Prologue 4

R. Abbahu opened his discourse with the text, 'But they, to a man, have transgressed the covenant' (Hosea 6:7). This alludes to the first man, of whom the Holy One, blessed be He, said, "I brought him into the Garden of Eden and imposed a command upon him, but he transgressed it; so I punished him by driving him out and sending him forth,* and lamented over him, Ekah.

*"Driving out" connotes expulsion from a particular place; "sending forth" connotes to a further distance.

"I brought him into the Garden of Eden," as it is said, And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15).

"I imposed a command upon him," as it is said, And the Lord God commanded the man, saying... (ib. 16).

"But he transgressed My command," as it is said, Have you eaten of the tree, from which I commanded you not to eat? (ib. III, 11). "So I punished him by driving him out," as it is said, 'So He drove out the man' (ib. 24), and "by sending him forth", as it is said, 'Therefore the Lord God sent him forth' (ib. 23), and 'lamented over him, Ekah', as it is said, Where are you?--ayyakah (ib. 9), this being written ekah.

Similarly with his descendants. I brought them into the land of Israel, as it is said, And I brought you into a land of fruitful fields (Jer. 2:7). I gave them commandments, as it is said, 'Command the children of Israel' (Lev. 24:2). They transgressed My ordinances, as it is said, 'Yea, all Israel have transgressed Your law' (Dan. 9:11). So I punished them by driving them out, as it is said, 'I will drive them out of My house' (Hosea 9:15), and by sending them forth, as it is said, 'Cast them out of My sight and let them go forth' (Jer. 15:1); and I lamented over them, "How lonely sits..." (Lam. 1:1).

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God is impartial

Midrash - Lamentations Rabbah Prologue 6

R. Abbahu, in the name of R. Jose b. Hanina, opened his discourse with the text, 'Ephraim shall be desolate' (Hosea 5:9). When? In the day of rebuke, i.e. the day on which the Holy One, blessed be He, will argue with them in judgment [to show his impartiality] You find that when the ten tribes were exiled, Judah and Benjamin were not exiled; and the ten tribes kept asking, 'Why did He exile us and not them? Is it because they reside in His Palace? [The Temple was in Judah.] Is there perhaps some favoritism here?' God forbid! There is no favoritism here; but the reason is that they had not yet sinned. When they did sin, He exiled them. Then the tribes exclaimed: 'O our God, O our God, O mighty One, O mighty One, O truthful One, O truthful One! Even towards the children of His house He displays no partiality.? Since they sinned, they were exiled; and since they were exiled, Jeremiah began to lament over them, "How lonely sits..." (Lam. 1:1).

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Parallels in destruction of First and Second Temples

Midrash - Lamentations Rabbah Prologue 12

R. Phinehas said in the name of R. Hoshai: There were four hundred and eighty Synagogues in Jerusalem, apart from the Temple. From where is this derived? From the word "full" [in 'she that was full of justice' (Isa. 1:21)], the numerical value of its letters being that total.¹ In each there was an elementary school for Scripture and an advanced school for Mishnah, and Vespasian² went up and destroyed all of them. Even every great man's house (II Kings 25:9): i.e. the academy of Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai. Why does he call it "great house"? Because there he taught the praise of the Holy One, blessed be He.³ Since they sinned, they were exiled; and since they were exiled, Jeremiah began to lament over them, "How lonely sits..." (Lam. 1:1).

(1) The total is 481, i.e. 480 Synagogues and the Temple.

(2) The Commander of the Roman Army. There is, of course, an anachronism here, the verses quoted referring to the first Temple, whereas Vespasian and R. Johanan b. Zakkai lived at the destruction of the second Temple. Nevertheless the translation from the one to the other is quite intelligible.

(3) "Great house" is understood as "the house of Him Who is great".

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God does not dwell with exiles

Midrash - Lamentations Rabbah Prologue 29

Zabdi b. Levi opened his discourse with the text, 'God makes the solitary to dwell in a house' (Ps. 68:7). Before the Israelites were delivered from Egypt they lived apart by themselves, and the Shechinah was by itself; but when they were delivered, they were united [with the Shechinah]. When, however, they were exiled, the Shechinah again resumed its separate existence and the Israelites theirs. That is the meaning of what is written, 'The rebellious dwell but in a parched land [in that it is deprived of the Shechinah] (ib.); hence "How lonely sits..." (Lam. 1:1).

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Why was Jonah successful and Jeremiah was not?

Midrash - Lamentations Rabbah Prologue 31

R. Simeon b. Yohai opened his discourse with the text, 'It is bad, it is bad, says the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasts' (Prov. 20:14). You find that before the Israelites were exiled, the Holy One, blessed be He, used to call them "bad"; and so it is written, 'Even this evil people, that refuse to hear My words' (Jer. 13:10). But when they were exiled, He began to praise them, as it is said, "But when he is gone his way, then He boasts" (Prov. ib.). Since they sinned they were exiled; and since they were exiled, Jeremiah began to lament over them, Ekah. [...]

Despite all this praise, she did not hearken to the voice, she did not make corrections; she did not trust in the Lord, she did not draw near to her God (Zeph. 3:2). If a bride does not obey [her husband], is she not a fool?...

...One prophet I sent to Nineveh, and she turned in penitence; but to Israel in Jerusalem I sent many prophets; and so it is written, 'Yet the Lord forewarned Israel, and Judah, by the hand of every prophet, and of every seer, saying: Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, etc.' (II Kings 17:13); and it is written, 'And though I have sent unto you all My servants the prophets, sending them daily betimes and often (Jer. 7:25), rising up early to send them in the morning, and rising up early to send them in the evening. Yet they did not hearken (ib. 26), and since they did not hearken they were exiled, and since they were exiled Jeremiah began to lament over them, "How lonely sits..." (Lam. 1:1).

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Jeremiah accepts no favors and stays with his people

Midrash - Lamentations Rabbah Prologue 34

'For the mountains will I take up a weeping and wailing, etc.' (Jer. 9:9).

R. Aha said: Nebuchadnezzar gave Nebuzaradan three orders concerning Jeremiah:

- 'Take him, and look well to him' (Jer. 39:12) -- to him, but not to his people;

- "and do him no harm" - do not do it to him, but with his people act as cruelly as you wish;

- "but do to him as he shall say to you" --this applies to him, but not to his people.

Jeremiah, however, beheld a band of young men set in neck-chains; so he put his head among them, but Nebuzaradan came and removed him from them. He then beheld a band of old men fastened with fetters; so he put his head among them, but Nebuzaradan came and removed him from them.

Nebuzaradan said to Jeremiah, 'I see one of three possibilities in you:

- either you are a false prophet,

-or you are impervious to pain,
-or you are a shedder of blood.

-Either you are a false prophet, because all these years you prophesied against this city that it would be destroyed, yet since it has been destroyed you are deeply distressed.

-Or you have a contempt for pain, because I have no desire to do you harm but you wish to do yourself harm, as though to say, "I take no notice of pain."

-Or you are a shedder of blood, because the king gave me strict orders concerning you not to harm you, but you wish harm to be done to yourself so that the king may hear of it and put me to death.'

Finally he said to him,

'If it is pleasing in your sight, come and I will look well after you";

but he refused, as it is mentioned in the end of the chapter, until it was told him by the mouth of the Almighty. That is what is written, 'The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord' (Jer. 40:1). What was that word? God said to Jeremiah, "If you remain here, I will go with them into captivity, and if you go with them, I will remain here." He spoke before Him, "Sovereign of the Universe, if I go with them, what good can I do for them? So let their King, their Creator, go with them, for He can do them much good." Hence it is written, 'After that Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go (ib.). 'Being bound in chains' (ib.): R. Aha said: If it is possible to say so, both He [God] and Jeremiah were bound in chains. As a parallel it is written, 'I was among the captives' (Ezek. 1:1).

To where does the prophecy of Jeremiah extend? [What message did God deliver to him then?] R. Jacob and R. Abba (another version is: R. Eleazar and R. Johanan) [gave varying answers]. One said: 'Down to He that scattered Israel doth gather him' (Jer. 31:10). The other said: 'Down to and there is hope for thy future, saith the Lord; and thy children shall return to their own border' (Jer. 17).

Upon Jeremiah's return, he found fingers cut off and cast upon the mountains. He collected them, embraced, fondled, and kissed them, placed them in his cloak, and said to them, "My children, did I not warn and tell you, Give glory to the Lord your God, before it grow dark, and before your feet stumble upon the mountains of twilight (Jer. 13:16)?"

With reference to that time it is said, 'For the mountains will I take up a weeping and wailing, and for the pastures of the wilderness a lamentation' (Jer. 9:9), i.e. for those beautiful and praiseworthy mountains will I take up a weeping and wailing, for the excellent men of Jacob who have been turned into a subject for lamentation.

"And they hear not the voice of the cattle (mikneh)," i.e. because they did not listen to the voice of words of Torah or to the voice of the words of prophecy, but [they only listened to] "mikneh", that means to the voice of the seducer (mekanne"), and provoked Him with idolatry, concerning which it is stated, 'They roused Him to jealousy with strange gods' (Deut. 32:16).

"Therefore both the fowl of the heavens and the beast are fled and gone." R. Jose b. Halafta said: For fifty-two years no bird was seen flying in the land of Israel. What is the proof? "Both the fowl of the heaven and the beast are fled and gone." The word for beast (behemah) has the numerical value of fifty-two.

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On Jeremiah

Jeremiah was a young prophet to whom G-d assigned a heartbreaking task. He was to tell Israel over and over again that destruction and exile were impending. Warnings for destruction and pleas for repentance - these were Jeremiah's message, but to no avail.

Prophets of doom are not popular, and no one was more unpopular than Jeremiah. His written prophecies were burned, he was accused as a false prophet and a charlatan, and finally he was thrown into a dungeon.

Someone else might have become consumed with hatred for the people that spurned and humiliated him, but not Jeremiah. At the orders of King Nebuchadnezzar, the conquering Babylonian general

Nebuzaradan released Jeremiah and treated him graciously, but he was not comforted by his vindication or his freedom. Jeremiah sought his suffering brothers. He found their bloody footprints and weepingly knelt to kiss the bloodstained ground. When he caught up with their famished, brutalized ranks, he embraced and kissed them. He tried to put his own head in their heavy, abrasive chains, but Nebuzaradan chased him away.

To his brethren, he cried out, 'If only you had wept once (in remorse over your sins) when you were still in Zion, you would not have been exiled!' Alas, they had not wept, but he did - before, during, and after his personal and national ordeals. The Book of Eichah is Jeremiah's personal elegy, his lament for his people, and it alludes to Jewish woe throughout history.

On Huldah

Huldah, the wife of Shallum ben Tikvah, was one of seven prophetesses mentioned in T'NaCh who lived in different times. These seven prophetesses were: Sarah, Miriam, Devorah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah and Esther.

According to Rabbinic interpretation, Huldah said to the messengers of King Josiah, "Tell the man that sent you to me," etc. (II Kings xxii. 15), indicating by her unceremonious language that for her Josiah was like any other man. The king addressed her, and not Jeremiah, because he thought that women are more easily stirred to pity than men, and that therefore the prophetess would be more likely than Jeremiah to intercede with God in his behalf (Meg. 14a, b; comp. Seder 'Olam R. xxi.). Huldah was a relative of Jeremiah, both being descendants of Rahab by her marriage with Joshua (Sifre, Num. 78; Meg. 14a, b). While Jeremiah admonished and preached repentance to the men, she did the same to the women (Pesi'. R. 26 [ed. Friedmann, p. 129]). Huldah was not only a prophetess, but taught publicly in the school (Targ. to II Kings xxii. 14), according to some teaching especially the oral doctrine. It is doubtful whether "the Gate of Huldah" in the Second Temple (Mid. i. 3) has any connection with the prophetess Huldah; it may have meant "Cat's Gate"; some scholars, however, associate the gate with Huldah's schoolhouse (Rashi to Kings I.c.).E. C. L. G.

The book that Huldah authenticated: Rabbinic sources such as Rashi explain that it was the original Torah written by Moses himself (that was hidden generations earlier from King Ahaz so he would not burn it). Modern critical scholars suggest that the book of the law was most likely Deuteronomy.

Jeremiah was commanded by God to go to Anathoth because his merits were so great that God could not destroy Jerusalem as long as Jeremiah was in the city. In the prophet's absence the city was conquered and the Temple set on fire. When, on his return, Jeremiah saw smoke rising from the Temple, he rejoiced, thinking that the Jews had repented and that the smoke was that of the sacrifice which they were offering. He wept bitterly when he realized his error, grieving that he had left Jerusalem to be destroyed. Jeremiah accompanied the captives as far as the Euphrates, and only then returned to comfort those who had been left behind (Jer. 40:6; PR 26:131).

-As he approached the ruins of Jerusalem, he had a vision of a woman, clad in black, sitting on top of a mountain, weeping and exclaiming, "Who will comfort me?" After explaining that she was mother Zion, Jeremiah comforted her with the promise that God would rebuild and restore Zion (PR 26:131-132). Jeremiah remained in Egypt until Nebuchadnezzar conquered that country. He was then taken to Babylon where he rejoined his exiled brethren (SOR 26).

Jérémiades (French): Constant, annoying, nagging whining and complaints

Man is obligated to bless God for the evil, in the same manner he blesses God for the good. (Berachot 54a)
