

<sup>3</sup>Israel is holy to the LORD,  
The first fruits of His harvest.  
All who eat of it shall be held guilty;  
Disaster shall befall them

—declares the LORD.

נֹאֲמֵי יְהוָה: פ

קֹדֶשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל לַיהוָה  
רֵאשִׁית תְּבוּאָתָהּ תִּבְּרָא  
כָּל-אֹכְלֵיוּ יִאָּשָׁמוּ  
רָעָה תִּבְּרָא אֲלֵיהֶם

Verse 3 turns on a different metaphor. Instead of referring to Israel's relation to God as one of espousal and marriage (v. 2), that relationship is now imagined in terms of the donation of "first fruits." Jeremiah's identification of Israel with first fruits also echoes a theme sounded by Hosea (Hos. 9:10). In this case, the prophet's rhetoric is a transformation of Lev. 22:14–16. The Pentateuchal law warns against the desecration of gifts (*kodesh*) devoted to the Lord and speaks of the guilt (*ashmah*) that accrues through eating (*akhal*) thereof. In the prophet's transformation, the cultic rule is read as a metaphor for God's relationship to his people. In Jeremiah's revision of the law, Israel is figured as God's sacral portion (*kodesh*) and the nations that destroy them (*akhal*) are "held guilty" (*asham*)—with disastrous consequences.

**3. holy** Jeremiah's depiction of the nation as a "holy" people is indebted to contemporary Deuteronomic theology, where the same notion is articulated (see Deut. 7:6). This categorical formulation is a revision of the conditional depiction of the people's holy status found in Exod. 19:4–6. In that context, Israel may become holy *if* it observes God's teachings. The Deuteronomic revision deems Israel holy *per se* and therefore holds it responsible for its covenantal observance. In any event, both of these depictions are metaphorical and without ritual implications. They stand in contrast to Korah's assertion that all the nation is "holy" in Num. 16:3. As this proclamation did carry cultic implications, it was intended and perceived as a rebellion against the authority of Moses and Aaron.

#### CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE HAFTARAH AND THE SPECIAL SABBATH

The haftarah is the first of three prophetic readings of admonition that precede the fast of Tisha b'Av. This three-week period begins after the fast of the seventeenth of Tammuz, which marks the first breach in the walls of Jerusalem by the ancient Babylonians (during the time of the First Temple). The interval between this fast day and the fast of Tisha b'Av is known in rabbinic literature as *bein ha-metzarim*, "Between the Breaches" (after the phrase in Lam. 1:3, "All her pursuers overtook her *in the narrow places*"). This period is also designated as *telata' de-puranuta*, or "The Three [Weeks] of Admonition," because of the warnings of divine punishment recited in the haftarot chosen for this time.

After this cycle of admonitions, there follow seven weeks when prophecies of consolation are recited. This interval is known as *shivata' de-nehemata*, or "The Seven [Weeks] of Consolation." The combined total of ten readings are in turn followed by other haftarah readings connected to the theme of repentance, which marks the holy days of the New Year. There is thus a major liturgical shift that begins this week (and continues for a quarter of the year) when the haftarah is not associated with the *parashah* but with a specific theme. In the words of R. Abraham b. Nathan of Lunel, "From the *parashah* of Genesis to the seventeenth of Tammuz we recite haftarot in line with the topic of the *parashah*, in accordance with their similarity (*domeh le-domeh*); [but] from thence forward, all [haftarot are chosen] according to the time and occasion" (*Sefer Ha-Manhig, Hilkhot Ta'anit*, xvi).<sup>10</sup> This liturgical cycle was practiced in antiquity, though not codified until the Middle Ages. The earliest definite evidence occurs in the old Palestinian Midrash Pesikta de-Rav Kahana, where it forms a major component. This source dates from as early as the fifth century C.E.<sup>11</sup>—hence the practice preceded it by some time.

In the Pesikta, homilies presupposing the reading of Jer. 1:1ff. (the extent of the ancient readings is unspecified) are collected in piska 13 (entitled *divrei yirmeyahu*, "The words of Jeremiah," from the opening verse of today's haftarah). By contrast, in the Talmud, Rav Huna only refers to a custom of reading Isa. 1:14 ff. on the New Moon of Av that falls on a Sabbath (B. Megillah 31b)—and not to the cycle beginning with Jeremiah 1:1ff. In response to this gap, the medieval Tosafists state that it was their custom to "follow the tradition of the Pesikta" and recite Jer. 2:4 ff. and Isa. 1:1ff. before the fast

day (ibid., s.v. "The New Moon"). They further state that they recited Isa. 1:1ff. "on the Sabbath before Tisha b'Av"—not on the New Moon of Av that falls on a Sabbath (in accordance with B. Ta'anit 29b). Nothing is stated regarding Jer. 1:1ff. Nevertheless, the liturgical treatise *Mahzor Vitry* (which reflects medieval practices from the school of Rashi) does account for this reading as part of the three prophecies of admonition. It is alluded to there among a list of mnemonics for the several haftarah selections to be recited after the seventeenth of Tammuz. Maimonides also mentions our haftarah selection as the first pericope of the triad of admonitions in his *Mishneh Torah* (*Hilkhot Tefillah* 13:19).<sup>12</sup>

The present halakhic tradition of reciting the sequence Jer. 1:1ff., Jer. 2:4ff., and Isa. 1:1ff. is explicitly formulated in the *Shulhan Arukh* (Orah Hayyim 428:7). In this group, each of the readings begins with admonition and ends with consolation; indeed, the conclusions to the second (Jer. 4:1-2) and third (Isa. 1:27) haftarot deal with repentance. The reason the beginning admonitions were taken from the work of Jeremiah is undoubtedly because of the tradition that he composed the Book of Lamentations (recited on Tisha b'Av);<sup>13</sup> and the reason Isa 1:1-27 was selected as the concluding admonition is probably due to the fact that verse 21 reads "Alas [*'eikkah*], she has become a harlot, the faithful city"—in tragic anticipation of the opening line of the Book of Lamentations, "Alas [*'eikkah*]! Lonely sits the city once great with people!"<sup>14</sup>

## Haftarah for Mase'ei מסעי

ASHKENAZIM JEREMIAH 2:4-28 AND 3:4  
SEPHARDIM JEREMIAH 2:4-28 AND 4:1-2

## Haftarah for Mattot-Mase'ei מטות-מסעי

ASHKENAZIM JEREMIAH 2:4-28 AND 3:4  
SEPHARDIM JEREMIAH 2:4-28 AND 4:1-2

For Jeremiah's life and times and a consideration of his overall prophetic message and theology, see "The Book of Jeremiah" in "Overview of Biblical Books Excerpted in the Haftarah Cycle." See also the comments to the other haftarah readings taken from his prophecies (listed in "Index of Biblical Passages").

The haftarah delivers a scathing indictment of national faithlessness, ingratitude, and apostasy—addressed to the House of Jacob and to the families of the House of Israel. No date is given; but from the references to political alliances with Assyria and Egypt we may assume that Jeremiah spoke these words in the final decades of the Judean state (627-586 B.C.E.), when there were various attempts to ensure political protection against the Neo-Babylonian empire.<sup>1</sup> Otherwise, the accusation is without reference to specific historical events. The harsh judgments of the haftarah are counterpointed by the concluding words of consolation and hope. These are taken from Jer. 3:4 and 4:1-2, according to Ashkenazic and Sephardic tradition respectively.

### PART 1. BETRAYAL AND APOSTASY (Jeremiah 2:4-28)

a. Jeremiah 2:4-9 The accusation begins with a historical retrospective. First the ancestors of the present generation are criticized for apostasy, despite God's ongoing providence and protection. Priests, teachers, kings, and prophets all come under censure.

b. Jeremiah 2:10-19 The prophet then turns to the present generation. Incomprehensibly, they too have abandoned their historical God and turned to other deities and nations for help. For such acts of folly and futility, the Land and people suffer judgment.

c. Jeremiah 2:20-28 The accusation shifts to cultic apostasy, dramatizing the passion of the nation for Canaanite fertility practices—without any sense of shame or impurity. The hopes put in these alien gods will prove vain in times of trouble.

PART 2. HINTS OF HOPE (Jeremiah 3:4 and 4:1-2)

a. Jeremiah 3:4 Ashkenazic tradition concludes the diatribe with a hint that Israel has repented, calling again upon their ancestral God—"the Companion of my youth."

b. Jeremiah 4:1-2 Sephardic tradition concludes on a conditional note of promise: if Israel repents of idolatry and swears allegiance to God alone, it shall be blessed and praised among the nations.

CONTENT AND MEANING

The haftarah opens with God's charge of apostasy and ingratitude. It is formulated as a *riv* or accusation addressed first to the ancestors ("your fathers") of the present generation and then to the present generation along with their descendants (Jer. 2:5, 9). Following the generic pattern, the prophet charges the people with disregard of God's benefits and infidelity in religious practice.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, the *riv* begins with the ironic question "What wrong did your fathers find in Me that they abandoned Me?" and goes on to accuse them of never asking "Where is the LORD?" who brought them from Egypt, led them through the wilderness, and delivered them into the Promised Land. The implication is that the people have simply abandoned their historical God for no good reason, since the evidence of His providence is incontrovertible.

The accusation is rhetorically structured: The outermost frame rebukes the people for following false and useless gods (A / A'); the innermost frame charges them with disregard of YHWH and never inquiring about Him (B / B'); and the centerpiece recounts God's beneficence to the nation (C). Key words link the units.

A. "They went after delusion" (*va-yelkhu aharei ha-hevel*) (v. 5)

B. "They never asked . . . , 'Where [*'ayyeh*] is the LORD?" (v. 6)

C. God's historical guidance (vv. 6-7)

B'. "The priests never asked . . . , 'Where [*'ayyeh*] is the LORD?" (v. 8)

A'. "They followed what can do no good" (*aharei lo' yo'ilu halakhu*) (v. 8)

Other instances of covenantal infidelity are specified. God has been rejected for alien gods of little worth (Jer. 2:11-13) and for political alliances that will come to naught (vv. 16-19). And in an extensive diatribe against Israelite apostasy, Jeremiah depicts how the people have run after Canaanite fertility practices without shame or restraint: the nation is like a whore spread out on every hill (v. 20); like a pleasant plant turned foul (v. 21); like a she-camel in heat (v. 23); and like a thief caught red-handed (v. 26). The prophet's contempt and disbelief are punctuated by a series of questions: "what [*mah*] wrong did your fathers find in Me?" (v. 5), or "what, then, is the good [*mah lakh*]?" (v. 18), or "how" have you changed and "how" can you deny your sin (vv. 21, 23). In several extensive queries he wonders how Israel could betray its God (v. 11) or be like a slave left for plunder (v. 14). The force of this rhetoric is to express the dumbfoundedness of the prophet and the unassailability of his accusation.

In a concluding act of derision, Jeremiah mocks the zest for idolatry of the people—who "said to wood, 'You are my father,' to stone, 'You gave birth to me'" (Jer. 2:27). And then, echoing his opening salvo, when he charged the people for not asking "Where [*'ayyeh*] is the LORD?", Jeremiah ends on a similar rhetorical note. The query "Where are those gods [*'ayyeh 'elohekha*] you made for yourself?" (v. 28) ridicules the people's piety and the folly of their apostasy. The question gives the entire diatribe a ring form and brings it to a poignant conclusion.

Following the denunciation, liturgical tradition appends a positive ending. Ashkenazic custom reads Jer. 3:4 as a counterpoint. The divine statement that the people have now turned to Him and "called to Me, 'Father!'" (3:4), reverses the preceding acclamation of wood as "my father" (2:27). The terminology signals a return to the divine patrimony and a forthright assertion of loyalty.

Sephardic tradition follows a different course, articulating conditions for divine blessing. Hence, repentance is still an option—nothing concrete has changed. Four stages are marked off: a return to God, a rejection of idolatry, an affirmation of resolve, and an oath of loyalty. The sequence makes clear that religious transformation is a process, involving decision and resolve at each point. Such a

scenario anticipates the later Jewish tradition formulated by Saadiah Gaon and Maimonides, whereby repentance also goes through several stages—including the need to divest oneself of negative practices and become firm in this resolve.<sup>3</sup>

## TEXT AND COMMENTS

- 2 <sup>4</sup>Hear the word of the LORD, O House of Jacob,  
Every clan of the House of Israel!  
<sup>5</sup>Thus said the LORD:  
What wrong did your fathers find in Me  
That they abandoned Me  
And went after delusion and were deluded?  
<sup>6</sup>They never asked themselves, "Where is the LORD,  
Who brought us up from the land of Egypt,  
Who led us through the wilderness,  
A land of deserts and pits,  
A land of drought and darkness,  
A land no man had traversed,  
Where no human being had dwelt?"  
<sup>7</sup>I brought you to this country of farm land  
To enjoy its fruit and its bounty;  
But you came and defiled My land,  
You made My possession abhorrent.  
<sup>8</sup>The priests never asked themselves, "Where is the  
LORD?"  
The guardians of the Teaching ignored Me;  
The rulers rebelled against Me,  
And the prophets prophesied by Baal  
And followed what can do no good.

ב 4 שְׁמְעוּ דְבַר־יְהוָה בֵּית יַעֲקֹב  
וְכָל־מִשְׁפָּחוֹת בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל:  
5 אָמַר יְהוָה  
מִה־מָצְאוּ אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם בִּי עוֹל  
כִּי רָחֲקוּ מֵעָלַי  
וַיֵּלְכוּ אַחֲרֵי הַהֶבֶל וַיִּהְיוּ:  
6 וְלֹא אָמְרוּ אֵיךְ יְהוָה  
הַמַּעֲלָה אֶתְנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם  
הַמּוֹלִיד אֶתְנוּ בְּמִדְבָּר  
בְּאֶרֶץ עֲרָבָה וְשׁוּמָה  
בְּאֶרֶץ צִיָּה וְצִלְמוֹת  
בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא־עֹבֵר בָּהּ אִישׁ  
וְלֹא־יֹשֵׁב אָדָם שָׁם:  
7 וְאָבִיָּא אֶתְכֶם אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַכְּרָמֹל  
לֶאֱכֹל פְּרִיָּה וְטוֹבָה  
וּתְבָאוּ וּתְטַמְּאוּ אֶת־אֶרֶצִי  
וְנִחַלְתִּי שְׁמִתְכֶם לְתוֹעֵבָה:  
8 הַכֹּהֲנִים לֹא אָמְרוּ אֵיךְ יְהוָה  
וּתְפָשִׂי הַתּוֹרָה לֹא יָדְעוּנִי  
וְהָרַעִים פָּשְׁעוּ בִּי  
וְהַנְּבִיאִים נִבְּאוּ בַּפֶּעַל  
וְאַחֲרֵי לֹא־יָדְעוּלִי הִלְכִּי:

*Jeremiah 2:5. What wrong did your fathers find in Me* Such rhetorical questions are characteristic of the *riv*-accusation form. Compare the beginning of the accusation in Mic. 6:3, where God asks: "My people! What wrong have I done you?" Jeremiah's use of the term "find" (*matza*) has a legal overtone. Compare Deut. 24:1.

*6. Where is the LORD?* This type of query often invokes issues of divine might or presence. In Judg. 6:13, Gideon ponders: "If the LORD is with us . . . [w]here are all His wondrous deeds?" Similarly, in Joel 2:17 and Ps. 42:4 and 11, the nations mock Israel and ask, "Where is your/their God?" See further below, on verse 28.

*7. defiled My land* Acts of idolatry and false worship defile the land and the perpetrators. This is explicitly the case in Lev. 18:24–25.

*8. guardians of the Teaching* The "guardians" are included in a larger list of indicted persons (including priests, prophets, and kings; see also v. 26 and 18:18). The term itself, Hebrew *toṣei ha-Torah*, literally indicates those who "take hold of the Torah." It most properly denotes a technical skill or ability (cf. Gen. 4:21; Amos 2:15). The cognate Akkadian verb (*sabitu*) and noun (*sabitu*) also apply a term for "taking" to the act of teaching.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Oh, I will go on accusing you

—declares the LORD—

נאם־יהוה

9 לכן עד אָרִיב אֶתְכֶם

And I will accuse your children's children!

וְאֶת־בְּנֵי בְנֵיכֶם אָרִיב:

<sup>10</sup>Just cross over to the isles of the Kittim and look,

10 כִּי עָבְרוּ אֵי כִתִּיִּם וְרָאוּ

Send to Kedar and observe carefully;

וְקָדָר שְׁלַח וְהִתְבּוֹנֵן מְאֹד

See if aught like this has ever happened:

וְרָאוּ הֵן הִיְתָה כְּזֹאת:

<sup>11</sup>Has any nation changed its gods

11 הֲהִימִיר גּוֹי אֱלֹהִים

Even though they are no-gods?

וְהִמָּה לֹא אֱלֹהִים

But My people has exchanged its glory

וְעַמִּי הִמִּיר כְּבוֹדוֹ

For what can do no good.

בְּלֹא יוֹעִיל:

<sup>12</sup>Be appalled, O heavens, at this;

12 שִׁמוּ שָׁמַיִם עַל־זֹאת

Be horrified, utterly dazed!

—says the LORD.

וְשַׁעְרוֹ חָרְבּוּ מְאֹד

<sup>13</sup>For My people have done a twofold wrong:

נאם־יהוה

They have forsaken Me, the Fount of living waters,

13 בִּי־שָׁתִּימַם רָעוּת עָשָׂה עַמִּי

And hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns,

אֲתִי עָזְבוּ מְקוֹר | מֵיִם חַיִּים

Which cannot even hold water.

לְחַצֵּב לָהֶם בְּאֵרוֹת \* בְּאֵרֹת \* נִשְׁבְּרִים

<sup>14</sup>Is Israel a bondman?

אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָכְלוּ הַמַּיִם:

Is he a home-born slave?

14 הַעֲבָד יִשְׂרָאֵל

Then why is he given over to plunder?

אִם־יָלִיד בֵּית הוּא

מִדּוּעַ הִיָּה לָבִי:

v. 13. יתיר א' פעמיים

**10. isles of the Kittim** Refers to ancient Greek Kition, modern-day Larnaca on Cyprus.<sup>5</sup>

**Kedar** An old Arab tribe (Gen. 25:13); located in the east of Transjordan, in northern Arabia.<sup>6</sup>

**11. its glory** Hebrew *kevodo*. Alternatively, this phrase refers to God's heavenly Glory (i.e., "His Glory"), which the people denied and exchanged for "no-gods." In fact, rabbinic tradition considered this passage one of the so-called *tikkunei soferim*, or "scribal corrections," introduced into the biblical text for the sake of a divine euphemism (cf. the list in Mekhila de-Rabbi Ishmael, Shirata 6 [on Exod. 15:7]). The original reading presupposed by this change is *kevodi*, "My Glory." Such a stark formulation presumably led certain scribes to soften the wording by a slight orthographic change. Many interpreters, however, do not regard the new reading to be a true scribal correction, but rather a midrashic conceit allowing references to God's Glory to be introduced into the text.<sup>7</sup> A similar "correction" occurs in the rabbinic lists for Hos. 4:7.<sup>8</sup> Compare also Ps. 106:20.

**12. utterly dazed** Hebrew *horvu*. This verbal form is a retraction from *harovu*. Medieval Jewish grammarians called this phenomenon a *nasog ahor*. For another instance, compare the *keri* (the text as read) with the *ketiv* (the written text) at Judg. 9:12.

**13. the Fount of living water** This image may derive from the homily in Deut. 6:11–12, where the themes of hewn wells, forsaking God, the Exodus, and slavery are found. The Masoretic pointing is *borot*, "pits," though the orthography (with *alef*) requires a plural for "wells" (cf. Gen. 14:10; 26:15). The theme of God as a Fount of water and the overall motif of the well are developed in classical Jewish literature.<sup>9</sup>

**14. Is Israel a bondman?** The accusation shows a preference for multiples. A double query occurs in verse 11; a triple rhetorical question appears here and in verses 31–32. Various formulations occur; in verse 14, the interrogative structure uses the particles *ha-* + *'im* + *madu'a*.<sup>10</sup>

15 Lions have roared over him,  
 Have raised their cries.  
 They have made his land a waste,  
 His cities desolate, without inhabitants.  
 16 Those, too, in Noph and Tahpanhes  
 Will lay bare your head.  
 17 See, that is the price you have paid  
 For forsaking the LORD your God  
 While He led you in the way.  
 18 What, then, is the good of your going to Egypt  
 To drink the waters of the Nile?  
 And what is the good of your going to Assyria  
 To drink the waters of the Euphrates?  
 19 Let your misfortune reprove you,  
 Let your afflictions rebuke you;  
 Mark well how bad and bitter it is  
 That you forsake the LORD your God,  
 That awe for Me is not in you  
 —declares the Lord GOD of Hosts.  
 20 For long ago you broke your yoke,  
 Tore off your yoke-bands,  
 And said, "I will not work!"  
 On every high hill and under every verdant tree,  
 You recline as a whore.  
 21 I planted you with noble vines,  
 All with choicest seed;

15 עליו ישאגו כפרים  
 נתנו קולם  
 וישיתו ארצו לשמה  
 עריו נעתה נעתו מבלי ישוב:  
 16 גם-בני-נף ותחפנס ותחפנחס  
 ירעוך קדקד:  
 17 הלא-זאת תעשה-לך  
 עזבך את-יהוה אלהיך  
 בעת מוליכך בדרך:  
 18 ועתה מה-לך לדרך מצרים  
 לשתות מי שחור  
 ומה-לך לדרך אשור  
 לשתות מי נהר:  
 19 תיסרך רעתך  
 ומשבותיך תוכחך  
 ודעי וראי כי-רע ומר  
 עזבך את-יהוה אלהיך  
 ולא פחדתני אליך  
 נאם-אדני יהוה צבאות:  
 20 כי מעולם שברתי עלך  
 נתקתי מוסרתך  
 ותאמרי לא אעבד אעבד  
 כי על-כל-גבעה גבעה ותחת כל-עץ  
 רענן  
 את צעה זנה:  
 21 ואנכי נטעתך שרך  
 בלה זרע אמת

**16. Noph and Tahpanhes** Cities in Egypt. The Egyptians, like the Assyrians, will prove a disappointment; compare 2:36 [Transl.].

**16, 18.** The Egyptian toponyms have been hebraized. *Noph* is a corruption of *Moph* (see Hos. 9:6) or Memphis (Saqqara, in the lower Nile). *Tahpanhes* is literally two words: "fortress of the Nubian" (Tel Dafne). The second word (*panhes*) is well-known from the name of the Aaronid priest *Pinhas* (Phinehas). The Hebrew form *mey shihor*, "waters of the Nile," derives from the Egyptian phrase *p' sh-hr*, "Pool of Horus" (cf. Isa. 23:3).

**20. you broke** Hebrew *shavarti*. This is not the common first-person form "I broke," but the archaic (or aramaizing) second-person feminine singular form. Compare also *nitakti*, "you broke" in verse 20. Another archaic (or aramaizing) form in this piece is *nitztah* (v. 15) preserved in the *ketiv* (or written form). This is a third-person plural verb, meaning "they were laid to waste." The more common form (*nitztu*) is preserved in the *keri* (read form). Compare also Deut. 21:7.

**And said** Hebrew *va-to'meri*; literally, "and you said." This form recurs in verses 23 and 25, thus a threefold assertion of resistance and intransigence. Thus Israel incriminates herself.

**work** Following the *ketiv*; *keri* "transgress" [Transl.].

Alas, I find you changed  
 Into a base, an alien vine!  
 22 Though you wash with natron  
 And use much lye,  
 Your guilt is ingrained before Me

—declares the Lord GOD.

23 How can you say, "I am not defiled,  
 I have not gone after the Baalim"?  
 Look at your deeds in the Valley,  
 Consider what you have done!  
 Like a lustful she-camel,  
 Restlessly running about,  
 24 Or like a wild ass used to the desert,  
 Snuffing the wind in her eagerness,  
 Whose passion none can restrain,  
 None that seek her need grow weary—  
 In her season, they'll find her!

25 Save your foot from going bare,  
 And your throat from thirst.  
 But you say, "It is no use.  
 No, I love the strangers,  
 And after them I must go."  
 26 Like a thief chagrined when he is caught,  
 So is the House of Israel chagrined—  
 They, their kings, their officers,  
 And their priests and prophets.  
 27 They said to wood, "You are my father,"

ואיך נהפכת לי  
 סודי הגפן נכריה:  
 22 כי אם-תכבסלי בנתר  
 ותרבי-לך ברית  
 נכתם עונך לפני

נאם אדני יהוה:

23 איך תאמרי לא נטמאתי  
 אחרי הבעלים לא הלכתי  
 ראי דרכך בגיא  
 דעי מה עשית  
 בכרה קלה

משרכת דרכיה:  
 24 פרה | למד מדבר  
 באות נפשו נפשה שאפה רוח  
 תאנתה מי ישיבנה  
 כל-מבקשיה לא יעפו  
 בחדשה ימצאונה:

25 מנעי רגלך מיחר

וגרונך וגרונך מצמאה  
 ותאמרי נואש לוא

כי-אהבתי זרים  
 ואחריהם אלך:

26 כבשת גנב כי ימצא  
 כן הבישו בית ישראל  
 הקמה מלביהם שריהם  
 וכהניהם ונביאייהם:

27 אמרים לעץ אבי אתה

21. *I find . . . into a base, an alien vine* Paraphrasing the difficult Masoretic *li, surey ha-gefen nokhriyyah*. Alternatively, read *le-suryah, gefen nokhriyyah*—a regrouping of consonants that is supported by the Septuagint. This yields the lament, "[O, how then could you have changed] into a rebellious, alien vine?!" A divinely planted vine turning to rot occurs in Isa. 5:2 and 4, as S. D. Luzzatto has noted. In fact, the term *sorek*, "noble vine" (2:21), is also found there. The divine planting contrasts with the pagan boughs under which Israel sins (Jer. 2:20). The image also alludes to God's planting of Israel in the Land at the time of settlement (Exod. 15:17, Ps. 80:9ff.).

23. *in the Valley* That is, of Hinnom; compare 7:31–32; 32:35: "They have built shrines of Baal . . . where they offered up their sons and daughters . . ." [Transl.].

25. *But you say, "It is no use"* This idiom is used elsewhere in Jeremiah (18:12), also in connection with idolatrous practices. As an expression of resistance it is also found in Isa. 57:10. Like in Jer. 2:28, that polemic also speaks of how the people's idols will be useless to save them when they need help (Isa. 57:12–13). A common rhetorical pattern may underlie both formulations.

*strangers* That is, other gods [Transl.].

27. *"You are my father"* This statement resonates with legal adoption formulas, as when God says to the king: "You are My son, I have fathered you this day" (Ps. 2:7; cf. 2 Sam. 7:14).

To stone, "You gave birth to me,"  
While to Me they turned their backs  
And not their faces.  
But in their hour of calamity they cry,  
"Arise and save us!"  
28 And where are those gods  
You made for yourself?  
Let them arise and save you, if they can,  
In your hour of calamity.  
For your gods have become, O Judah,  
As many as your towns!

3 4 Just now you called to Me, "Father!  
You are the Companion of my youth."

4 If you return, O Israel

—declares the LORD—

If you return to Me,  
If you remove your abominations from My presence  
And do not waver,  
2 And swear, "As the LORD lives,"  
In sincerity, justice, and righteousness—  
Nations shall bless themselves by you  
And praise themselves by you.

וְלֹאֲכֹן אֶת יִלְדֹתַי יִלְדָּתָנוּ  
כִּי־פָנֵנוּ אֵלַי עֶרְךָ  
וְלֹא פָנִים  
וּבָעֵת רָעָתָם יֹאמְרוּ  
קֹדֶמָה וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ:  
וְאַיֶּה אֱלֹהֶיךָ 28  
אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ לָךְ  
יְקוֹמוּ אֱסִי־שִׁיעוֹךָ  
בְּעֵת רָעָתְךָ  
כִּי מִסָּפֶר עָרֶיךָ  
הֵיוּ אֱלֹהֶיךָ יְהוּדָה: ס

ג 4 הֲלֹא מֵעַתָּה קִרְאתִי קִרְאת לִי אָבִי  
אֵלֶיךָ נִעַרִי אֶתָּה:

ד אִם־תָּשׁוּב יִשְׂרָאֵל |

נֶאֱמַר־יְהוָה

אֵלֵי תָשׁוּב  
וְאִם־תִּסָּר שְׁקוּצֶיךָ מִפְּנֵי  
וְלֹא תִגֹּד:  
2 וְנִשְׁבַּעְתָּ חֵי־יְהוָה  
בְּאֵמֶת בְּמִשְׁפָּט וּבְצֶדֶק  
וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בּוֹ גּוֹיִם  
וּבּוֹ יִתְהַלָּלוּ: ס

28. *where are those gods / You made for yourself?* A polemical query; compare above, on verses 6 and 8. The mockery here is against the many gods that claimed deliverance. In Isa. 36:19, a similar query was enunciated by Rabshakeh, an Assyrian envoy to Jerusalem at the end of the eighth century B.C.E. Seeking to undermine Judean resistance to the upcoming Assyrian invasion, he asked: "Where were the gods of Hamath and Arpad? . . . And did they save Samaria from me?"

*Jeremiah 3:4. Just now* In context, "at that moment [when you saw that I had stopped the rain, as mentioned in 3:3]" (Kimḥi); or, "as of now" (with Targum; cf. Rashi). A shift to the theme of repentance is effected by a reversal of the false formula of patrimony ("They said to the wood, 'You are my father'" [2:27]) for the proper one: "Just now you called to Me, 'Father!'"

*Jeremiah 4:2. And swear* This profession of worship echoes the covenant formula of Hos. 2:21–22 after the renewal of Israel's relation with the God of her youth (Hos. 2:17). The idea that "nations shall bless themselves by you" (Heb. "him"; see Kimḥi) (Jer. 4:2) echoes the divine promise to Abraham: "And all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you" (Gen. 12:3). The theme is thus a renewal of national destiny, promised here as a renewal of origins and blessing.

*As the LORD lives* A fixed oath formula, denoting commitment to the national God.<sup>11</sup>

## CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE HAFTARAH AND THE SPECIAL SABBATH

The haftarah is read on the second week before Tisha b'Av and is the second of three recitations of admonition before that fast (see the discussion in the haftarah for Mattot). Rabbinic tradition gave close attention to the opening word *shim'u* (Jer. 2:4) and its call to "hear" the word of God that calls them to account. This term evokes the formula *na'aseh ve-nishma'*, articulated by the nation at Sinai

and affirming that the people "will do and obey" the covenant (Exod. 24:7). Several midrashic homilies go further and rhetorically challenge each limb of the body to "hear" and "heed" the duties and commandments appropriate to it.<sup>12</sup> The misbehavior of the nation as depicted by Jeremiah thus serves as a negative example.

The prophet's challenge to the people is marked by the repeated query "how?": "How [*'eikh*] have you changed" from a noble vine into a base one? (Jer. 2:21);<sup>13</sup> and "How [*'eikh*] can you say, 'I am not defiled?'" (v. 23). Repeating this word, Jeremiah expresses puzzlement at Israelite perversity and obtuseness in a way that ironically anticipates the opening elegy *'eikhah* ("O how?!" or "Alas!") of the Book of Lamentations.

# Haftarah Parshat Matot- Masei

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Haftarah Parshat Matot- Masei (Jeremiah 2:4–28; 3:4) outside of Israel

August 6, 2016 / 2 Av 5776

Please note: in Israel we read Parshat Masei

Jeremiah sought with all of his heart to convince his people to turn from their disastrous behavior so that Jerusalem and the First Temple would be saved from the destructive hands of the Babylonians. He urged the people to listen to his message: "Hear the word of the Lord (devar HaShem), O House of Jacob, every clan of the House of Israel." (2:4)

Jeremiah admonished his people and expected them to alter their behavior accordingly. The Pesikta d'Rav Kahana, an Eretz Yisrael midrash from the period of the Talmud, proffers a midrash on this theme for this second of three Shabbatot which precede Tisha b'Av (Tlata d'poranuta). In it, the author explores the human tendency to ignore guidance which might help avoid tragedy: "Listen to the words of the Torah so that you will not have to listen to the words of the prophet; listen to the words of the prophet so that you will not have to listen to words of admonition; listen to words of admonition so that you will not be forced to listen to words of reproach; listen to words of reproach so that you will not have to hear the sound of horns and pipes (the decrees of foreign kings); listen in the land (the homeland – Eretz Yisrael) so that you will not have to listen outside the land (in exile); listen while you are alive so that will not have to listen after you are dead; listen with your ears so that you will not have to listen with your bodies, listen with your bodies so that you will not need to listen with your bones." (14:4 – Mandelbaum ed. p. 243)

This midrash urges attentiveness. People are often blind to the reality which faces them. Disaster does not strike overnight. It often happens incrementally, in a way which could have been avoided if proper precautions had been taken. Jeremiah warned his people of the challenges which faced them. He cajoled them to mend their ways, but no one was willing to listen. Things got progressively worse until it was too late.

We often face similar challenges and let problems fester until they are too large to be conquered. If only we would have heeded the warnings when the problems were manageable. It is not without irony that the problems which cropped up in the final generations of the First Temple resemble those of the last generations of the Second Temple. It is just human nature. And it is tragic. The antidote seems simple – to listen, to discern and remedy before it is too late.

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