

הפטרת שמות

HAFTARAH FOR SH'MOT

JEREMIAH 1:1-2:3 (*S'fardim*)

In this *haftarah*, Jeremiah is commissioned as a messenger to deliver God's word. Jeremiah's inauguration is reinforced by two visionary signs (1:11-12, 13-15), which introduce the themes of divine providence and approaching doom.

The call to prophecy (1:4-10) is presented as an autobiographical fragment. God's word strikes terror in Jeremiah's heart, but his fear is countered by a promise of divine protection and verbal inspiration, a promise repeated at the end of the chapter in the image of an inviolable city (vv. 18-19). The prophet's cry of woe (*ahah*) and the divine exhortation not to fear capture the mood of anxiety.

A highly stylized literary pattern captures this private moment in Jeremiah's life, presenting him as a true prophet in the standard mode. The same pattern is also preserved in the prophetic call of Moses (see Exod. 3:10-12, 4:15; cf. Isa. 6:5-7; Ezek. 2:3-3:11). Like Moses before him, Jeremiah is sent forth to prophesy against his personal inclination but with divine assurances. The *haf-*

tarah closes as usual with a hopeful assertion (2:1-3).

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE PARASHAH

The *parashah* and the *haftarah* are linked through the prophetic commissions of Moses and Jeremiah, dramatizing the continuity of divine guidance throughout the generations and repeating a pattern of divine address, human resistance, and divine assurance. Moses and Jeremiah function as intermediaries between the divine spirit and the people. Through them it is taught that Israel's life is determined not by earthly political powers but by divine care and judgment. They thus challenge the peoples' perceptions of the everyday (the Israelites' weariness of spirit in the time of Moses and Israel's political vision in Jeremiah's day). The prophets, who sense the enormity of their task and their personal inadequacy, are strengthened by divine reassurances as they set out to confront the resistance of others.

1 The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. ²The word of the LORD came to him in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign, ³and through-

וַיְהִי דְבַר יְהוָה אֵלַי בְּיָמַי יְאֻשִׁיָּהוּ
הַכֹּהֵנִים אֲשֶׁר בַּעֲנֹתוֹת בְּאָרֶץ בְּנֵימִן:
אֲשֶׁר הָיָה דְּבַר יְהוָה אֵלַיו בְּיָמַי יְאֻשִׁיָּהוּ
בֶן-אֲמֹן מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה בְּשָׁלֹשׁ-עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה

Jeremiah 1:1. Jeremiah The Hebrew vocalization (*yirmiyahu*) is derived from either the root רמה or the root רום. Thus the name "Jeremiah" means "The LORD loosens," or "the LORD is exalted." The name is attested in Hebrew seals from the 8th century and in letters (written on potsherds) found in the city of Lachish shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem.

Anathoth A leitical city in the territory of Benjamin (see Josh. 21:18). The oracles of Jere-

miah, who was a resident of Anathoth (Jer. 29:27), incurred the wrath of the local people (11:21). His family also had land holdings there (32:7).

2. in the thirteenth year of his reign The reign of King Josiah. This corresponds to 627 B.C.E., a volatile time when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon rebelled against his Assyrian overlord. That was the first stage in Babylon's gradual rise to political dominance in the region.

out the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, when Jerusalem went into exile in the fifth month.

לְמַלְכוֹ: 3 וַיְהִי בַיָּמִי יְהוֹשִׁיָּהוּ בֶן-יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ
מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה עַד-תֵּם עֲשֵׁתִי עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה
לְצִדְקִיָּהוּ בֶן-יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה עַד-
גָּלוּת יְרוּשָׁלַם בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַחֲמִישִׁי: 5

4The word of the LORD came to me:

4 וַיְהִי דְבַר-יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:

5Before I created you in the womb, I selected you;

Before you were born, I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet concerning the nations.

5 בְּטֶרֶם אֶצּוֹר אֶצְרָךְ בְּטֶטֶן יִדְעִיתִיךָ
וּבְטֶרֶם תֵּצֵא מִרְחֹם הַקֶּדֶשׁ תִּתִּיךָ
נְבִיא לַגּוֹיִם נְתַתִּיךָ:

6I replied:

Ah, Lord God!

I don't know how to speak,

For I am still a boy.

7And the LORD said to me:

Do not say, "I am still a boy,"

But go wherever I send you

And speak whatever I command you.

8Have no fear of them,

For I am with you to deliver you

—declares the LORD.

6 וָאָמַר

אָהֵה אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה

הִנֵּה לֹא-יָדַעְתִּי דְבַר

כִּי-נָעַר אָנֹכִי: 7

7 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי

אַל-תֹּאמַר נָעַר אָנֹכִי

כִּי עַל-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר אֲשַׁלְחֶךָ תֵּלֵךְ

וְאֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶה תִּדְבֹּר:

8 אַל-תִּירָא מִפְּנֵיהֶם

כִּי-אֲתָךְ אֲנִי לְהַצִּילָךְ

נְאֻם-יְהוָה:

9The LORD put out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: Herewith I put My words into your mouth.

9 וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוָה אֶת-יָדוֹ וַיַּגַּע עַל-פִּי וַיֹּאמֶר

יְהוָה אֵלַי הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי דְבָרִי בְּפִיךָ:

10 רְאֵה הַפֶּקֶדֶתִיךָ | הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה

עַל-הַגּוֹיִם וְעַל-הַמַּמְלָכוֹת

לְנִתּוֹשׁ וּלְנִתּוֹץ

10See, I appoint you this day

Over nations and kingdoms:

To uproot and to pull down,

3. *until the end of the eleventh year . . . in the fifth month* Jerusalem actually fell on the ninth day of the fourth month of Zedekiah's 11th year (Jer. 39:2, 52:5–6).

5. *Before I created you* This translation follows the version of the Hebrew text as read (*k'rei*). This yields the word "*etzorkha*," which is derived from the root יָצַר (create). The motif of creation in the womb occurs in ancient Near Eastern royal annals (Assyrian and Egyptian), where it indicates the divine appointment of a king. The version of

the Hebrew text as written (*k'tiv*) yields the word "*atzurkha*," derived from צוּר and translated as "I formed you" (Rashi, Kara).

a prophet concerning the nations This phrase has long puzzled commentators, because Jeremiah often speaks to the Israelites—not only to the nations. Rashi and Radak refer to verse 7 to maintain that both Israel and the gentiles were included in Jeremiah's mission. However, one could maintain that only foreign nations are referred to in this verse, because the commission re-

To destroy and to overthrow,
To build and to plant.

¹¹The word of the LORD came to me: What do you see, Jeremiah? I replied: I see a branch of an almond tree.

¹²The LORD said to me:

You have seen right,
For I am watchful to bring My word to pass.

¹³And the word of the LORD came to me a second time: What do you see? I replied:

I see a steaming pot,
Tipped away from the north.

¹⁴And the LORD said to me:

From the north shall disaster break loose
Upon all the inhabitants of the land!

¹⁵For I am summoning all the peoples
Of the kingdoms of the north

—declares the LORD.

They shall come, and shall each set up a throne

Before the gates of Jerusalem,
Against its walls roundabout,
And against all the towns of Judah.

¹⁶And I will argue My case against them

For all their wickedness:

They have forsaken Me

And sacrificed to other gods

And worshiped the works of their hands.

¹⁷So you, gird up your loins,

Arise and speak to them

All that I command you.

Do not break down before them,

Lest I break you before them.

fers to the nations who will exact judgment on Israel (vv. 5,10), a theme that dominates the vision of the pot (vv. 13-15).

וְלִהְיוֹת וּלְהָאֲבִיר וּלְהָרוֹס
לְבָנוֹת וּלְנָטוּעַ: פ

¹¹וַיְהִי דְבַר-יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר מַה-אַתָּה רֹאֶה יִרְמְיָהוּ וַאֲמַר מִקַּל שָׁקֵד אֲנִי רֹאֶה:

¹²וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי הִטְבַּת לִרְאוֹת כִּי-שָׁקֵד אֲנִי עַל-דְּבָרִי לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ: פ

¹³וַיְהִי דְבַר-יְהוָה אֵלַי שֵׁנִית לֵאמֹר מַה אַתָּה רֹאֶה וַאֲמַר סִיר נִפְוֹחַ אֲנִי רֹאֶה

וּפָנָיו מִפָּנַי צְפוֹנָה: ¹⁴וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי מִצְפוֹן תִּפְתַּח הָרָעָה עַל כָּל-יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ:

¹⁵כִּי אֲהַנִּי קֹרֵא לְכָל-מְשֻׁפָּחוֹת מַמְלָכוֹת צְפוֹנָה נָא-יְהוָה וּבָאוּ וְנָתְנוּ אִישׁ כִּסְאוֹ פֶתַח שַׁעַר יְרוּשָׁלַם

וְעַל כָּל-חֹמֹתֶיהָ סָבִיב וְעַל כָּל-עָרֵי יְהוּדָה: ¹⁶וְדִבַּרְתִּי מִשְׁפָּטִי אוֹתָם עַל כָּל-רָעָתָם אֲשֶׁר עָזְבוּנִי וַיִּקְטְרוּ לֵאלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ לַמַּעֲשֵׂי יְדֵיהֶם:

¹⁷וְאַתָּה תֶּאָזֵר מִתְּנִיךְ וְקָמַת וְדִבַּרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם אֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי אֶצְוֶה אֶל-תַּחַת מִפְּנֵיהֶם פֶּן-אַחַתָּךְ לַפְּנֵיהֶם:

13-14. steaming pot The translation states that the "steaming" (*nafu-ah*) pot is "tipped away from the north" (v. 13), thereby symbolizing the

18I make you this day
A fortified city,
And an iron pillar,
And bronze walls
Against the whole land—
Against Judah's kings and officers,
And against its priests and citizens.
19They will attack you,
But they shall not overcome you;
For I am with you—declares the LORD—to
save you.

2 The word of the LORD came to me, say-
ing, ²Go proclaim to Jerusalem: Thus said the
LORD:

I accounted to your favor
The devotion of your youth,
Your love as a bride—
How you followed Me in the wilderness,
In a land not sown.
³Israel 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.

outbreak (*tippatah*) of the destruction from that region (v. 14). But the Hebrew formulation is unclear, and commentators have suggested, with good reason, that the pot was actually facing north to receive the evil (Radak, Kara, Luzzatto).

Jeremiah 2:2. The positive portrayal of Israel's youthful past and the marital symbolism of the Covenant contradict the repeated episodes of Israel's faithlessness found in the Torah. The various depictions of Israel's relationship with God reflect different streams of tradition.

3. Jeremiah's depiction of the nation as a

18 וְאֲנִי הֵנָּה נִתְתִּיף הַיּוֹם
לְעִיר מְבֻצָּר
וְלַעֲמֻד בְּרֹזֶל וְלַחֲמוֹת נְחָשֶׁת
עַל-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ
לְמַלְכֵי יְהוּדָה לְשָׂרֶיהָ
לְכֹהֲנֶיהָ וְלָעָם הָאָרֶץ:
19 וְנִלְחָמוּ אֵלֶיהָ
וְלֹא-יִוָּכְלוּ לָהּ
כִּי-אֲתָךְ אֲנִי נָאִם-יְהוָה לְהַצִּילָךְ: פ

ב וַיְהִי דְבַר-יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר: ² הֲלֹךְ
וְקִרְאתָ בְּאָזְנִי יְרוּשָׁלַם לֵאמֹר כֹּה אָמַר
יְהוָה
זָכַרְתִּי לָךְ
חֶסֶד נְעוּרֶיךָ
אֲהָבַת כְּלוּלֶיךָ
לְכַתֶּךָ אַחֲרֵי בְמִדְבָּר
בְּאָרֶץ לֹא זְרוּעָה:
³ קִדֵּשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל לַיהוָה
רִאשִׁית תְּבוּאָתָה תְּבוּאָתוֹ
כָּל-אֲכָלִיו יֵאָשְׁמוּ
רָעָה תָּבֵא אֵלֵיהֶם
נָאִם-יְהוָה: פ

holy people articulates the theology of Deuteronomy (see Deut. 7:6), which revises the conditional nature of the people's holy status found in Exod. 19:4-6. In that context of Exodus, Israel may become holy if it observes God's teachings. The revision in Deuteronomy deems Israel holy per se and, therefore, obligated to fulfill its covenantal obligations.

In its original context, this verse described past events (see 2:4-8). But as the climax to this haftarah, its meaning shifts; it becomes a prophecy of hope.

²God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD. ³I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but I did not make Myself

וַיִּדְבֹר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
אֲנִי יְהוָה: ³וַיֵּאָרָא אֶל-אַבְרָהָם אֶל-יִצְחָק
וְאֶל-יַעֲקֹב בְּאֵל שְׁדֵי וְשְׁמִי יְהוָה לֹא

DIVINE REAFFIRMATION (6:2-7:13)

Moses and the Israelites are demoralized because their situation has deteriorated sharply. God reappears to Moses and reveals the essential nature of the divine name and its relation to the promises made to the patriarchs.

3. I did not make Myself known An enigmatic phrase. It cannot mean that a previously unknown divine name—YHVH—is about to be revealed for the first time. A divine promise is of little credibility if it is made by an unknown deity.

In this *parashah*, Pharaoh continues his refusal to grant the Israelites their freedom. God threatens to continue to harden Pharaoh's heart, so that only after several terrible plagues will he relent. Moses and Aaron do not succeed in impressing Pharaoh and his court magicians with their wonders. The first 7 of the Ten Plagues are called down on the Egyptians. The confrontation between Moses and Aaron on the one hand and Pharaoh on the other, between God's emissaries and those who defy God, becomes sharper. Even Pharaoh's new order that the slaves gather their own straw for making bricks fits this process of escalation. The situation for both the Egyptians and the Israelites must become unbearable to overcome the tendency of both sides to maintain the status quo.

"why did You bring harm upon this people?" Why have You waited while so many have suffered and died? When the Redemption occurs, it will be too late for them!). *Elohim*, the divine attribute of justice, wants to strike at Moses for speaking thus, but the attribute of mercy speaks out ("I am YHVH") and saves him, realizing that he was speaking in that tone on behalf of people who have suffered so much for so long (Exod. R. 6:1). This is the last time that the divine name *Elohim*/justice appears in any speech of God to Moses. Henceforth it will always be YHVH/mercy.

Why is it necessary to prolong the process of liberation? It is not enough that the Israelites be freed. That might mistakenly be seen as an act of magnanimity on Pharaoh's part. They must be freed in such a way that they, the Egyptians, and all the nations of the world will understand that it was God's doing, not Pharaoh's goodwill. (This is important, not so much to burnish God's reputation but to establish the principle that it is unacceptable for one human being to reduce another human being to slavery, that freedom is the will of God and not the choice of a despot.)

A modern midrashic interpretation: Why did God speak to Moses exclusively in the name of the attribute of mercy from this moment on? Hearing Moses' concern for those who would not live to see the liberation from slavery, God declared: "I cannot judge this man! He is as righteous a judge as I! Therefore I will speak to him only with the voice of Mercy, for the burden of caring for the Israelites is so great, and only Moses is merciful enough to do it." Another modern midrashic interpretation: "To the patriarchs, I revealed Myself as a nurturing, mothering God. [Some suggest that *Shaddai* may be related to the word *shadayim*, "breasts."] My relationship to them was that of a parent to a child, encouraging and forgiving, making few demands. But with this man Moses, I will speak face to face, as one adult to another. I will reveal to him My personal, intimate name, YHVH. Moreover, because Moses defends the cause of the Israelites so passionately, I will show this side of My nature to them as well: 'And you shall know that I, YHVH, am your God who freed you from the labors of the Egyptians' (6:7)." "God of your fathers" is the God of Genesis; YHVH is the God of Exodus (B. Jacob).

CHAPTER 6

2. I am the LORD According to the Midrash, God has two attributes: justice (represented by the divine name *Elohim*, translated "God") and mercy (represented by the divine name YHVH, translated "the LORD"). This verse would seem to represent a conflict within God, in which the attribute of justice would chastise Moses for seeming to lose faith (5:22: