

THE BOOK OF YIRMIYAHU
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Shiur #27: The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Fate of Yirmiyahu
(Chapters 39-40)

Introduction

Chapter 39 describes the bitter fate of Jerusalem. Yirmiyahu's call for surrender to the Babylonians went unheeded; after a long siege, which continued for a year and a half, the walls of Jerusalem were breached. King Tzidkiyahu tried to escape from the Babylonians and was captured and punished with exceeding cruelty. The last thing that he saw, a moment before the Babylonians blinded him, was his children being slaughtered before his very eyes. The Babylonians destroyed and burned the city, exiling the remnants of its beleaguered population to Babylonia (1-9).

Along with the harsh portrayal of the destruction and slaughter, several glimmers of hope are evident in the second half of the chapter. Nevuzar'adan leaves the poor of the people in Jerusalem (10), and on the orders of Nevuchadnetzar, he saves Yirmiyahu (11-14). At the end of the chapter, mention is made of a prophecy of rescue that Yirmiyahu prophesied before the destruction about Eved-Melekh the Kushi, who had saved him from death in the pit of mire (15-18).

When was the City Breached?

The chapter begins by noting two dates – the date of the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem¹ and the date of the breaching of the walls of the city:

In the ninth year of Tzidkiyahu king of Yehuda, in the tenth month, Nevukhadnetzar king of Bavel and all his army came against Jerusalem, and they besieged it. In the eleventh year of Tzidkiyahu, in the fourth month, the ninth day of that month, a breach was made in the city.

There is a contradiction between the date given here for the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem – the ninth of Tammuz – and the date appearing in the Mishna (*Ta'anit* 4:6): "On the seventeenth of Tammuz, the tablets [of the Law] were shattered, the daily offering was discontinued, a breach was made

¹ Here mention is made only of the month in which the siege began – the tenth month which is the month of Tevet. In the parallel account in II *Melakhim*, it is stated that this took place on the tenth of the month, the tenth of Tevet (*Asara Be-Tevet*).

in the city, and Apostomos burned the scroll of the Law and placed an idol in the Temple." Various solutions to this contradiction are offered in the two Talmuds. The Babylonian Talmud states:

A breach was made in the city: Did this then happen on the seventeenth? Is it not written: "In the fourth month, in the ninth day of the month, the famine was sore in the city," and in the following verse it is written: "Then a breach was made in the city." Rava said: This is no contradiction. The one refers to the First Temple and the other to the Second Temple. For it has been taught: In the First Temple the breach was made in the city on the ninth of Tammuz, but in the Second Temple on the seventeenth of Tammuz. (*Ta'anit* 28b)

Rava distinguishes between the two Temples. The breaching of the city during the First Temple period, which is described in the book of *Yirmiyahu*, took place on the ninth of Tammuz, whereas the breach during the Second Temple period occurred on the seventeenth of Tammuz. According to this, the fast observed on the seventeenth of Tammuz relates only to the destruction of the Second Temple.

The *Yerushalmi* offers a different solution:

It is written: "On the ninth of the month the city was breached," and you say this? R. Tanchum bar Chanilai said: There is a disarrangement of dates here... This may be likened to a king who was calculating dates, when people came and told him: Your son was taken captive! And his dates became disarranged. Let this be the first day for dates. [*Korban Ha-Eida* explains: "Owing to the multitude of their troubles, they erred in the dates, but Scripture did not want to change from what they thought, as if to say: 'I am with him in his trouble.'"]

Support for the *Yerushalmi's* explanation may be brought from the wording of the *mishna*: "A breach was made in the city." This language is taken from the verse about the First Temple: "And a breach was made in the city" (II *Melakhkim* 25:4). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the reference here is to the destruction of the first Temple.

The *Yerushalmi's* answer is surprising. As the *Korban Ha-Eida* explains, it is based on the spiritual principle of "I am with him in his trouble." In other words, the miscalculation of the days reflects the difficult situation in the nation, and this error is granted halakhic standing, which expresses God's identification with the difficult situation of the people.²

The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Prophecy of Yirmiyahu

² For a discussion concerning the fundamental significance of the *Yerushalmi's* answer regarding our understanding of prophecy and its relation to reality, see R. Avaham Y. Kook, *Eder Ha-Yakar*, pp. 37-38.

The verses that follow describe the capture of the city by Nevuchadnetzar's army. The account of the capture and the destruction parallel – both linguistically and substantively – Yirmiyahu's prophecy of consecration, in which he predicted the destruction already at the beginning of his mission:

The Prophecy of Consecration (chapter 1)	The Account of the Destruction (chapter 39)
<p>(15) For, lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, says the Lord; and they shall come, and they shall set everyone his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all its walls round about, and against all the cities of Yehuda.</p> <p>(16) And I will utter My judgments against them regarding all their wickedness, in that they have forsaken Me, and have burned incense to other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands.</p>	<p>(3) And all the princes of the king of Bavel came in, and sat in the middle gate, namely Nergal-sar-etzer, Samgar-nevo, Sarsekhim, Rav-saris, Nergal-sar-etzer, Rav-mag, with all the remainder of the princes of the king of Bavel...</p> <p>(5) But the army of the Kasdim pursued after them, and overtook Tzidkiyahu in the plains of Yericho; and when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nevukhadnetzar king of Bavel to Rivla in the land of Chamat, where he gave judgement upon him.</p>

Yirmiyahu foresees "the families of the kingdoms of the north" setting their thrones at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem. At the beginning of his prophetic career, Yirmiyahu does not yet note the name of the northern kingdom. In practice, the princes of the king of Bavel sit at "the middle gate," this action symbolizing their control over the city.³ But in the prophecy of consecration, Yirmiyahu attributes their sitting at the gates of Jerusalem to God: "For, lo, I will call."

Sitting at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem bears symbolic meaning in light of the role of the gates of Jerusalem in the book of *Yirmiyahu* as the place of public observance or desecration of Shabbat and as the place of executing justice and judgment (17:24-27; 22:1-5). Yirmiyahu also prophesied about the gates as the site of possible reward – or destruction.

The linguistic parallel between the prophecy of consecration and the description of the destruction in our chapter appears later as well. In the wake of the breaching of the city and its falling into the hands of the Babylonian army and its princes, Tzidkiyahu and his people flee at night from the city toward the east, "the way of the Arava." It may have been their intention to escape to Moav or Amon on the east bank of the Jordan. But the Babylonians pursue after them and catch up to them at the plains of Yericho.⁴ Tzidkiyahu

³ This parallel was noted by the Radak in his commentary.

⁴ According to the parallel account in *Melakhim*, when Tzidkiyahu was captured, all of his army scattered. Rashi cites an interesting *midrash*, the source of which has been lost, regarding Tzidkiyahu's capture: "[Tzidkiyahu] had a cave that extended from his house to the

is brought to Nevuchadnetzar at his command post in Rivla, in northern Syria: "He gave judgment upon him." It stands to reason that Nevuchadnetzar judged him for his rebellion against him. This follows also from the following verses which describe his punishment: "Then the king of Bavel slew the sons of Tzidkiyahu in Rivla before his eyes; also the king of Bavel slew all the nobles of Yehuda. Moreover, he put out Tzidkiyahu's eyes, and bound him with fetters, to carry him to Bavel."⁵ In Yirmiyahu's prophecy of consecration, we find a similar expression immediately after the description of the setting of the thrones at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem: "And I will utter My judgments against them."⁶ It is likely that this parallel indicates the deeper significance of the judgment of the Babylonian king. From this perspective, Nevuchadnetzar's rebuke represents, as it were, God's rebuke. Nevuchadnetzar rebukes Tzidkiyahu for his rebellion and political treachery,⁷ but from his mouth Tzidkiyahu hears the voice of God rebuking him for his spiritual rebellion. Thus, reading the account of the destruction against the backdrop of the prophecy of consecration reveals its deeper meaning.

The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Rescue of Yirmiyahu and Eved-Melekh

Scripture moves on from the fate of the king and the princes to briefly describe the fate of the city and its inhabitants: "And the Kasdim burned the king's house and the houses of the people with fire, and broke down the walls of Jerusalem. Then Nevuzar'adan the captain of the guard carried away captive into Bavel the remnant of the people that remained in the city and the deserters who had deserted to him, with the rest of the people that remained." This concise account assumed tangible form in the archaeological testimony uncovered in recent years in the City of David excavations:

Archaeologists have uncovered dramatic evidence of the battle and the fire that took hold of all the houses of Jerusalem in several places, including the government complex in Area G. Dozens of iron and bronze arrowheads found there are silent testimony to the final moments of the battle. The thick layer of ash and the charred walls that were found in all the buildings in this area illustrate the tragic end. In one building, the signs of destruction are particularly striking. In the

plains of Yericho, and they went out by way of the cave. What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do to fulfill 'My net also will I spread upon him' (*Yechezkel* 12:13)? He summoned a deer before the Kasdim, walking on the roof of the cave outside the city, and they chased after it to apprehend it, and it ran to the entrance of the cave, and they saw Tzidkiyahu emerging from the cave." The *midrash* teaches us that even the capture of Tzidkiyahu was achieved with Divine assistance.

⁵ The killing of his sons, apart from the difficult personal significance, expresses the destruction of the royal house. The gouging of the king's eyes also has symbolic meaning – of subjugation, as we find regarding Shimshon that the Pelishtim gouged out his eyes after capturing and imprisoning him.

⁶ It should be noted that the expression "*le-daber et ... mishpat*" is relatively rare, appearing only a few times in Scripture, primarily in the book of *Yirmiyahu*.

⁷ See, for example, the words of the Radak: "'He gave judgment upon him' – for having rebelled against him and for having breached his covenant and for having transgressed the oath that he took in the name of God."

"Burnt Room," the archaeologists have uncovered an entire house that collapsed inwards from the intensity of the fire. The flames took hold of the wood-beamed ceiling, which collapsed, along with the second floor. The picture that remained was one of a heap of stones, and under it a layer of ashes and destruction 90 cm. high... The command to destroy the walls of the city that repeatedly rebelled against Bavel was intended to dismantle all of Jerusalem's military capability. The results were particularly harsh. The entire eastern flank of the city was supported by ancient terraces that gradually descended down the eastern slope, each resting on the landfill of its neighbor, and ultimately on the bottom-most and strongest terrace – the city wall. After the wall was breached and undermined, the winter rains washed away the landfill, and the city's buildings began to collapse, creating great avalanches down the slope. The houses in Area G were covered with rocks, and they collapsed on the houses below them. The destruction was so great that this area was never again included in the city limits.⁸

In contrast to the account of the ruin and destruction in the second part of the chapter, mention is made of three rescues. Mention is first made of the remnant of the people who were allowed to remain in *Eretz Yisrael* by Nevuzar'adan: "But Nevuzar'adan the captain of the guard left of the poor of the people, who had nothing, in the land of Yehuda, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time." Along with the remnant of the people, Yirmiyahu was also saved by Nevuzar'adan. The chapter ends with Yirmiyahu's prophecy concerning Eved-Melekh the Kushi, which had been delivered already when Yirmiyahu was in the court of the guard, concerning Eved-Melekh's rescue from the horrors of the destruction due to his part in Yirmiyahu's rescue.

Chapter 40 shifts to a description of the events that took place among those who remained in *Eretz Yisrael* after the destruction. The chapter opens with the story of what happened to Yirmiyahu after the destruction, after he chose to remain in *Eretz Yisrael* and link up with Gedalyahu the son of Achikam, who was appointed by the king of Bavel over the poor people who remained in the land (1-6). From here until chapter 43 we move on to the story of the wretched lives of this group of people, headed by Gedalyahu, which constituted the last chance for rebirth after the exile.

On the surface, the story of Yirmiyahu's life after the destruction, with which chapter 40 opens, repeats the account in chapter 39, but the two stories are not consistent with each other.⁹

⁸ Aharon Horowitz, *Ir David – Sippura shel Yerushalayim Ha-Keduma* (Jerusalem, 5770), pp. 252-253.

⁹ The phenomenon of double accounts in the book of *Yirmiyahu* has been discussed at length in several *shiurim* (the prophecy concerning the Temple of God in chapters 7 and 26, the mission of Tzidkiyahu's men to Yirmiyahu in chapters 21 and 37, the two castings of Yirmiyahu into the pit in chapters 37 and 38, and others). As we noted elsewhere, it is not always clear whether we are dealing with two parallel stages or with two accounts of the same event.

Chapter 39	Chapter 40
<p>(11) Now Nevukhadnetzar king of Bavel gave charge concerning Yirmiyahu to Nevuzar'adan captain of the guard, saying:</p> <p>(12) Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm; but do to him as he shall say to you.</p> <p>(13) Then sent Nevuzar'adan the captain of the guard, and Nevushazban, the Rav-saris, and Nergal-sar-etzer the Rav-mag and all the princes of the king of Bavel.</p> <p>(14) And they sent and took Yirmiyahu out of the court of the guard, and committed him to Gedalyahu the son of Achikam the son of Shafan, that he should carry him home; so he dwelt among the people.</p>	<p>(1) The word that came to Yirmiyahu from the Lord, after Nevuzar'adan the captain of the guard had let him go from Rama, where he had taken him bound as he was in chains among all the exiles of Jerusalem and Yehuda who were carried away as exiles to Bavel.</p> <p>(2) And the captain of the guard took Yirmiyahu, and said to him: The Lord your God has pronounced this evil upon this place.</p> <p>(3) Now the Lord has brought it and done according as He has said; because you have sinned against the Lord, and have not obeyed His voice, therefore this thing is come upon you.</p> <p>(4) And now, behold, I release you this day from the chains which were upon your hand. If it seem good to you to come with me into Bavel, come, and I will set My eye upon you; but if it seem ill to you to come with me into Bavel do not come; behold, all the land is before you; wherever it seems good and convenient for you to go, go there.</p> <p>(5) Then since he did not yet turn about; Go back then, said he, to Gedalya the son of Achikam the son of Shafan, whom the king of Bavel has made governor over the cities of Yehuda, and dwell with him among the people; or go wherever it seems convenient to you to go. So the captain of the guard gave him an allowance of food and a present, and let him go.</p> <p>(6) Then Yirmiyahu went to Gedalya the son of Achikam to Mitzpa; and dwelt with him among the people that were left in the land.</p>

The similarity between the two accounts is striking. In both, Nevuzar'adan releases Yirmiyahu from his imprisonment, and from there he reaches Gedalyahu the son of Achikam. However, according to the account in chapter 40, Yirmiyahu was in the convoy of exiles; he was released from his chains on Nevuzar'adan's orders, but he chose to remain in *Eretz Yisrael* with Gedalyahu and not to go to Bavel. In contrast, according to the narrative in

chapter 39, Yirmiyahu was taken from the court of the guard on the personal order of Nevuchadnetzar and brought to Gedalyahu. It does not say here that this was Yirmiyahu's decision, but rather it says at the beginning of the passage that Nevuchadnetzar ordered him.

This contradiction is discussed by the commentators, who try to reconcile the two accounts in various ways.

Rashi writes:

"From Rama" – For he went into exile with them on his own, for Yirmiyahu saw a band of young men in chains, and he put his head in with them, and Nevuzar'adan came and removed him from them. He then saw a band of old men in chains, and he put his head in with them, and Nevuzar'adan came and removed him from them" (*Pesikta De-Rav Kahana*, 13). For you cannot say that Nevuzar'adan put him in chains, for Nevuchadnetzar commanded him: "Do him no harm."

Rashi combines the two accounts. In his view, Yirmiyahu was indeed released by Nevuzar'adan and his princes, as stated in chapter 39, but he asked on his own to join with the other exiles in order to identify with them in their troubles, and Nevuzar'adan was forced each time to remove him from there, as is described in chapter 40.

The Radak suggests a different solution:

"And they sent and took Yirmiyahu" (39:14) – This verse describes what they did in the end, because before they gave him to Gedalyahu, Nevuzar'adan spoke with him after finding him among those taken captive, bound in chains, like the rest of the exiles who were bound by the Kasdim who had entered the city, as they knew nothing about Yirmiyahu relating to what Nevuchadnetzar had ordered in his regard, as the order had been given to Nevuzar'adan. As for what it says, "from the court of the guard" (39:14), that is to say, that from there the captors took him, for he was there until the day that Jerusalem was captured, as it is written earlier. And it says about Yirmiyahu that the captors took him from the court of the guard and led him along with the rest of the exiles, and Nevuzar'adan and the rest of the king's princes gave him to Nevuzar'adan.

According to the Radak, we have here two stages, although their chronological order is just the opposite of their order in Scripture. The first stage is the account in chapter 40 – they first found him bound in chains and released him, and only afterwards did they give him over to Gedalyahu. Chapter 39 is sort of a general account, the details of which are found in chapter 40.

A Twofold Mission and a Twofold Fate

As stated, these explanations focus on the attempt to reconcile the two accounts and to synchronize between them. But they do not resolve the underlying problem of the double accounts. Along with these explanations, a proposal may be offered that focuses on the difference between the two accounts, rather than on their similarity. The two accounts may be intended to highlight two different perspectives on Yirmiyahu's situation.

Chapter 39 is a direct continuation of chapter 38. It describes the destruction and the Babylonian actions in Jerusalem, including the killing of its leaders and the exile of its people, but also Yirmiyahu's release from the court of the guard and the rescue of Eved-Melekh. There is a clear linguistic and substantive correlation between Yirmiyahu's words to Tzidkiyahu in the previous chapter and their realization here. Yirmiyahu had prophesied about the burning of the city and about Tzidkiyahu's failed attempt to escape and his capture by the king of Bavel:

So they shall bring out all your wives and your children to the Kasdim; and you shall not escape out of their hand, but shall be taken by the hand of the king of Bavel; and you shall cause this city to be burned with fire. (38:23)

This is indeed what happened; Tzidkiyahu was captured and Jerusalem was burned:

(4) And it came to pass, that when Tzidkiyahu the king of Yehuda and all the men of war saw them, then they fled and went out of the city by night, by the way of the king's garden, by the gate between the two walls; and he went out the way of the Arava. (5) But the army of the Kasdim pursued after them and overtook Tzidkiyahu in the plains of Yericho: and when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nevukhadnetzar king of Bavel to Rivla in the land of Chama, where he gave judgment upon him... (8) And the Kasdim burned the king's house and the houses of the people with fire, and broke down the walls of Jerusalem.

At the same time, the princes of Yehuda who sought to kill Yirmiyahu in chapter 38 are put to death by the king of Bavel in chapter 39.

Corresponding to this, chapter 39 emphasizes the contrast between the fate of the heads of the kingdom – Tzidkiyahu and his princes who failed to heed Yirmiyahu's prophecy and even tried to kill him – to the fate of Yirmiyahu, the prophet who remained faithful to God's word. Chapter 39 highlights the fact that Yirmiyahu was saved by Nevuzar'adan on the direct order of Nevuchadnetzar himself. As opposed to Tzidkiyahu, whom Nevuchadnetzar judged for his treachery, Yirmiyahu merited his protection by virtue of his "loyalty" and was released from his imprisonment to the remnant of Yehuda headed by Gedalyahu, who remained a free man. In chapters 37-38, Yirmiyahu was cast into the court of the guard and into a pit by the princes of Yehuda. Here, he is removed from the court of the guard by the princes of

the king of Bavel.¹⁰ Added to this is also an account regarding the fate of Eved-Melekh the Kushi, who merits being rescued by virtue of his loyalty to Yirmiyahu and his saving his life in the previous chapter: "But I will deliver you... for **I will surely allow you to escape**" (39:17-18). Here too what stands out is the contrast to the fate of Tzidkiyahu, about whom Yirmiyahu prophesied that he would not be delivered from the hands of the Babylonians: "And you shall not escape out of their hand" (38:23). And this indeed is what happened. The root of the matter is trust and lack of trust in God, as Yirmiyahu says to Eved-Melekh: "Because you have put your trust in Me" (18:23).

To summarize, chapter 39 is the direct continuation of chapter 38, and it describes the fulfillment of Yirmiyahu's prophecy in two directions.

In contrast, chapter 40, which opens the story of the remnant of Yehuda, emphasizes the connection between Yirmiyahu and the people of Yehuda, both his being chained together with them (and not in the court of the guard) and his personal and free choice to remain with Gedalyahu and rebuild the nation in their own land. Chapter 39 says that the princes of Bavel took him from the court of the guard "and committed him to Gedalyahu," Yirmiyahu seemingly entirely passive. Here, on the other hand, it is repeatedly emphasized that this was the result of Yirmiyahu's free choice:

- (4) And now, behold, I release you this day from the chains which were upon you hand. **If it seem good to you** come with me into Bavel, come **and I will look after you**; but **if it seem ill to you** to come with me into Bavel, do not come; behold, all the land is before you; **wherever it seems good and convenient for you** to go, go there...
(5) or go **wherever it seems convenient to you** to go.

After Nevuzar'adan releases Yirmiyahu from his chains, he gives him the choice to join the exile in Bavel, where the majority of the people will now be concentrated, or to remain in *Eretz Yisrael* with the poor of the people. Yirmiyahu, the prophet of the destruction and supporter of surrender to the Babylonians, merits now a personal relationship with Nevuchadnetzar and with Nevuzar'adan, who perceive him as "pro-Babylonian." But Yirmiyahu refuses to go with him to Bavel and be placed under his personal watch – "And I will look after you."¹¹ In contrast, that which is "good and convenient" in Yirmiyahu's eyes is to remain with the remnant of the nation in *Eretz Yisrael*. This action clarifies the fact that Yirmiyahu's support for surrender did not stem from political motives or from excessive closeness to Bavel, but was rather a result of his prophecy. It seems that after the destruction, Yirmiyahu thinks that there is hope for reestablishing national life in *Eretz Yisrael* through Gedalyahu, and so it follows also from what happens afterwards:

¹⁰ There is a certain correspondence between the description of the princes who take Yirmiyahu out of the court of the guard in verse 13 and the description of the princes who sit at the middle gate in verse 3. This parallel highlights the double role of the king of Bavel and his princes in the chapter: destruction and rescue.

¹¹ This phrase brings to mind Yosef's words to Binyamin in *Bereishit* 44:21, and joins the many other parallels between the stories.

"Then all the men of Yehuda returned out of all places unto which they were driven, and came to the land of Yehuda, to Gedalyahu, to Mitzpa" (40:12). This is a miniature form of the ingathering of Israel's exiles.

This trend is also evident in another difference between the accounts. In chapter 39, it says that Yirmiyahu dwelt among the people, whereas chapter 40 adds "that were left in the land" (6). Dwelling among the people stands in contrast to dwelling in prison, and its significance lies in the fact that Yirmiyahu was a free man. On the other hand, the words "that were left in the land" stand against the possibility given to Yirmiyahu to go to Bavel; he chooses to remain with those that were left in the land, since he sees in them the hope for the rebuilding of the nation. Yirmiyahu's choice is also contrasted to his previous situation. At the beginning of the chapter it said: "As he was in chains **among all the exiles of Jerusalem and Yehuda** who were carried away as exiles to Bavel" (1). Later in the chapter it says: "And he dwelt with him **among the people that were left in the land**" (6).¹²

Chazal relate an amazing dialogue between Yirmiyahu and God:

"The word that came to Yirmiyahu from the Lord, saying" (40:1). What was that word? Rather, He said to him: Yirmiyahu, if you stay here, I will go with them, and if you go with them, I will stay here. He said before Him: Master of the universe, if I go with them, how can I be of benefit to them? Rather, let their King and Creator go with them, as He can be of great benefit to them. This is what the verse states: "As he was in chains." R. Acha said: As it were, he and He [God] were in chains. (*Pesikta De-Rav Kahana* 13)

According to the *midrash*, Yirmiyahu's choice to remain in *Eretz Yisrael* stemmed from his desire that God should go with the exiles, who were in much greater need of Divine assistance – "I am with him in his trouble."

In this manner, the two accounts highlight the fundamental conflict in Yirmiyahu's prophecy and mission the entire length of the book. Yirmiyahu is the prophet of God, who prophesies great calamity for Yehuda and Jerusalem. On the other hand, Yirmiyahu dwells among his people and feels their pain. He prays to God and cries out bitterly against the harsh decree. The two sides of his mission turn him into the most tragic of the prophets of Israel, as we have already seen in several *shiurim*. *Chazal* provide a fitting description (*Mekhilta De-Rabbi Yishmael* 12:1):

¹² Another difference between the two accounts relates to the Babylonians' treatment of Yirmiyahu. In chapter 39, this is Nevuchadnetzar's initiative, which was executed by all his princes. As stated, this initiative was political in character. In chapter 40, a description is given of a personal meeting between Nevuzar'adan and Yirmiyahu, and it includes a lengthy speech given by Nevuzar'adan. In his speech, Nevuzar'adan emphasizes the religious dimension of the destruction, which befell Israel in accordance with the word of God in the wake of their sins. Following this introduction, Nevuzar'adan states: "And now... if it seem good to you to come with me into Bavel, come." This proposal may be based on the assumption that God's decree against His land and His people is final and absolute, and therefore Yirmiyahu should come to Bavel. The background of this proposal sharpens the significance of Yirmiyahu's decision to remain in *Eretz Yisrael*.

It turns out that there were three prophets. One insisted both upon the honor due to the Father and upon the honor due to the son; and one insisted upon the honor due to the Father, but not upon the honor due to the son; and one insisted upon the honor due to the son, but not upon the honor due to the Father. Yirmiyahu insisted upon the honor due to the Father and upon the honor due to the son....

Insisting upon the honor due to the Father and the honor due to the son characterizes the entire length of Yirmiyahu's mission. This duality underlies the two accounts of Yirmiyahu's fate: On the one hand, chapter 39 describes Yirmiyahu's rescue at the hand of the king of Bavel owing to his "pro-Babylonian" loyalty, as it were, and his prophecies of calamity and rebuke of the people – and his call for surrender. All these are the result of his prophetic mission. On the other hand, chapter 40 emphasizes that Yirmiyahu tied his fate of his own free will to the fate of the nation that he so greatly loved.

Appendix: The Parallel Accounts of the Destruction in *Yirmiyahu* 52 and in II *Melakhim* 25

The account of the destruction and the exile in our chapter has two parallels: one at the end of the book in chapter 52, and another at the end of II *Melakhim* in chapter 25. These two parallels are very similar to each other, but different from the account in our chapter regarding several important points.¹³ I will briefly review the main differences between the two accounts:

1. Chapter 39 does not explicitly mention the destruction of the Temple; it says only that the king's house and the houses of the people were burned. The date of the burning is also missing. In the parallel account in chapter 52 and in *Melakhim*, it is explicitly stated that Nevuzar'adan burned the house of God, and a date is also given: "in the fifth month, on the tenth of the month." Along with the burning of the Temple, a detailed account is also given of the Nevuzar'adan's plundering of its treasures.

2. Chapter 39 states in general: "The king of Bavel slew all the nobles of Yehuda" (6). In the parallel account, the names and numbers of the princes who were killed are spelled out. This account ends with the words: "Thus Yehuda was exiled out of his own land" (*Yirmiyahu* 52:27).¹⁴

3. In chapter 39, the rescue of Yirmiyahu and Eved-Melekh play a central role. In contrast, in the parallel account, they are not mentioned at all.

4. After the account of the destruction in chapter 39, chapter 40 describes the remnant of the people led by Gedalyahu. In contrast, in chapter

¹³ The account in chapter 39 is an integral part of the book of *Yirmiyahu*. In contrast, the account in chapter 52 appears to be a historical appendix, in which Yirmiyahu's name is not even mentioned.

¹⁴ In the account in *Yirmiyahu* 52, this statement is followed by a specification of the number of exiles.

52 this is not mentioned at all, and in *Melakhim* there is a brief mention of the armies that assembled around Gedalyahu and his assassination. In place of this, the two accounts end with the release of Yehoyakhin king of Yehuda from prison after thirty-seven years of exile, an act that constitutes a ray of hope for the future.

These differences may be connected to the different nature of the books. The book of *Melakhim* revolves around Shlomo's Temple and kingdom. Corresponding to the description of the building of the Temple at the beginning of the book, an account is given here of its destruction and plundering; and corresponding to the description of the plenty and the success of the kingdom of Yehuda in the days of Shlomo, the end of the book relates the exile of Yehuda: "So Yehuda was carried away out of their land." The book of *Yirmiyahu*, on the other hand, does not focus exclusively on the Temple, but rather on Yirmiyahu's prophecy and its failure. Here there is room for the main characters in that story: Tzidkiyahu, Yirmiyahu, Eved-Melekh, and the princes. The people who trusted in God and heeded the voice of His prophecy were saved. In contrast, the people who hardened their hearts and did not listen were punished by the king of Bavel.

Another difference between the books lies in their respective historical horizons. The book of *Yirmiyahu*, whose historical horizon ends with the conclusion of Yirmiyahu's prophecy, spells out in detail the stories of Gedalyahu and the remnant of Israel. From the perspective of the book of *Yirmiyahu*, even after the destruction there is room for hope, in the figure of Gedalyahu the son of Achikam. The book concludes with the remnant of Israel going to Egypt, against the prophecy received from Yirmiyahu, after the assassination of Gedalyahu.

The historical horizon in the book of *Melakhim* is more distant. The failure of the remnant is already a given, and therefore the exile in Bavel is a reality that is no longer in doubt. The only ray of light is elevation of Yehoyakhin by Evil-Merodakh, which may herald the restoration of the kingdom of Yehuda.

Here is the place to mention another description of the destruction, one that is shorter and more concise, at the end of *Divrei Ha-Yamim*. *Divrei Ha-Yamim* was written later, after the return to Zion. From this perspective, Yehoyakhin's elevation by the king of Bavel turns out retroactively to be of no significance, as the kingdom of Bavel fell into the hands of Paras. *Divrei Ha-Yamim* concludes the story of the destruction with the latest historical stage – Koresh's declaration heralding the return to Zion.

(Translated by David Strauss)