



Shemot (Sephardim): Jeremiah 1:1-2:3

Amid social and political oppression, a young prince strides out of his palace and strikes down an Egyptian guard, starting on a path that leads him to become a liberator of his people, a lawgiver, and God’s greatest prophet. Centuries later, a similarly young man, Jeremiah, rises to action in Judah. Assyria weakens to the north, with uncertain consequences for Judah. Generations of idolatry have thoroughly corrupted Judean society, Jerusalem, the Temple, and its divine service. Jeremiah’s prophetic predecessors have had, at most, only temporary successes. The reigning king of Judah, Josiah, is beginning to steer a more righteous course.

In Jeremiah’s inaugural prophecy, God forces him, like Moses before him, to accept His nearly impossible assignment. God tells him that He had already designated him as a prophet to Judah and the nations even before his mother conceived him. Jeremiah’s primary task is to convince Judah to return to God; otherwise, God will send northern nations to destroy them. The mission will be difficult, and Jeremiah fears those who will attack him, just as they attacked earlier prophets. God therefore promises to strengthen and protect him- but if Jeremiah loses courage, God will allow them to destroy him. Jeremiah replies that his youthful inexperience should delay his mission. God rejects this with three striking visions that show Jeremiah his prophetic power. Delay is impossible as He hurries to bring nations to destroy sinful Judah. The Haftarah concludes on a positive note: God commands Jeremiah to remind Judah of their loyalty to Him after the Exodus, and that He will destroy those who attack them.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 1:1-3: From a priestly family living near Jerusalem, Jeremiah begins to prophesy in 626 BCE, the 13th year of Josiah’s reign.

Jeremiah 1:1	ירמיהו א:א
The words of Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah, [one] of the priests [living in] Anathoth, in the land of Benjamin.	דבר ירמיהו בן־חלקיהו מן־הַכֹּהֲנִים אֲשֶׁר בְּעִנְתוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ בְּנֵימִן:

Verses 1:4-10: God tells Jeremiah that He appointed him, before his birth, as a prophet to all nations. Jeremiah replies that he is not yet fit for this mission. God tells him not to fear, “placing” His word in the prophet’s mouth.

Jeremiah 1:10	ירמיהו א:י
See, I have this day appointed you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, to pull down, to destroy, and to throw down; to build and to plant.	רָאָה הַפְּקֹדֶתִיָּהּ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה עַל־הַגּוֹיִם וְעַל־הַמְּמַלְכוֹת לְנִתּוֹשׁ וְלְנִתּוֹץ וְלִהְאַבֵּיד וְלִהְרוֹס לְבָנוֹת וְלִנְטוֹעַ: {פ}

Verses 1:11-12: God shows Jeremiah he can prophetically “see” an almond tree branch. He tells him that it symbolizes His speed in carrying out His word.

Jeremiah 1:11	ירמיהו א:יא
The Lord’s word came to me, saying, “What do you see, Jeremiah?” I said, “I see a rod of an almond tree.”	וַיְהִי דְבַר־ה' אֵלַי לֵאמֹר מַה־אַתָּה רֹאֵה יְרֵמְיָהוּ וַאֲמַר מִקֵּל שֶׁקֶד אֲנִי רֹאֵה:

Verses 1:13-16: God “shows” Jeremiah a boiling pot in the north. It symbolizes that God is bringing nations from the north to besiege Judah and Jerusalem for abandoning His worship to serve idols.

Jeremiah 1:15	ירמיהו א:ט"ו
“For, behold Me [as I] summon all the northern kingdoms’ families,” says the Lord. “Each will come and place his throne at the entrance of Jerusalem’s gates, against all its walls around, and against all Judah’s cities.”	כִּי הִנְנִי קוֹרֵא לְכָל־מְשֻׁפָּחוֹת מִמְּלָכוֹת צָפוֹנָה נְאֻם־ה' וְבָאוּ וְנִתְנוּ אִישׁ כִּסְאוֹ פֶתַח־שַׁעַר יְרוּשָׁלַם וְעַל כָּל־חוֹמֹתֶיהָ סָבִיב וְעַל כָּל־עָרֵי יְהוּדָה:

Verses 1:17-19: God tells Jeremiah that he must stand strong, like an “iron pillar”, while delivering His words to Judah and its corrupt leadership.

Jeremiah 1:18	ירמיהו א:י"ח
I [God], behold I have made you today into a fortified city, an iron pillar, and copper walls against the entire land- against Judah’s kings, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land.	וְאֲנִי הִנֵּה נֹתֵתִיךָ הַיּוֹם לְעִיר מְבֻצָּר וְלְעַמּוּד בְּרֹזֶל וְלַחֲמוֹת נְחָשֶׁת עַל־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ לְמַלְכֵי יְהוּדָה לְשָׂרֵיהָ לְכַהֲנֵיהָ וְלְעַם הָאָרֶץ:

Verses 2:1-3: God tells Jeremiah to tell Jerusalem that He remembers Israel’s loyalty to Him in the wilderness after the Exodus, and that He will punish those who harm His people.

Jeremiah 2:2	ירמיהו ב:ב
[Jeremiah,] go and call out in Jerusalem’s ears saying, “So said the Lord, ‘I remember for you the kindness of your youth, your love as [My] bride, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in an unsown land.’ ”	הֲלֹךְ וְקראתָ בְּאָזְנֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם לֵאמֹר כֹּה אָמַר ה' זָכַרְתִּי לְךָ תִּסֹּד נְעוּרֶיךָ אֲהַבְתָּ כְּלוּלֹתֶיךָ לְכַתֹּף אַחֲרַי בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּאָרֶץ לֹא זְרוּעָה:

Parashah Connections

Moses’s and Jeremiah’s respective prophetic inaugurations each include the following four steps:

God gives the prophet a mission to stand against world power(s).	Ex. 3:10- “I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt.”	Jer. 1:10- “I [God] have this day appointed you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, to pull down, to destroy, and to throw down; to build and to plant.”
The prophet denies the mission due to inability to speak.	Ex. 4:10- “O my Lord, I am not an eloquent man... I have heavy speech and a heavy tongue.”	Jer. 1:6- I [Jeremiah] replied: “Ah, Lord God! I don’t know how to speak for I am still a lad.”
God replies by placing His word in their mouths against the world power(s).	Ex. 4:12- “Now go, and I will be with you as you speak and will instruct you what to say.”	Jer. 1:7- “...[Jeremiah,] you shall go wherever I [God] send you and speak whatever I command you.”
God grants signs to demonstrate the prophet’s abilities.	Ex. 4:17- “[Moses,] take this rod in your hand with which you shall perform the signs.”	Jer 1:11- The Lord’s word came to me, saying, “What do you see, Jeremiah?” I said, “I see a rod of an almond tree.”

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