

## Chapter Thirty-One

This rather lengthy chapter continues the theme of Israel's return from exile in Babylon and her restoration. It begins with "At (*b-* or 'in') that time," the last occasion being 8.1, that being on a less than positive note. As for the Lord, reference to this future time is synonymous with his speaking, the verb *na'am*, being in conjunction with many prophetic utterances and found last in 30.21 but not noted there. The Lord continues with fleshing out "that time" after making sure the people are paying attention. He will be the God of all Israel's families or *mishpachah* (cf. 15.1) which also can refer to tribes; similarly they will be his people. The preposition *l-* is used twice: "to me" and "to people" (no definite article) indicative of a direct, ongoing relationship. Israel, of course, had belonged to the Lord but as her history reveals, strayed often from it. The latest installment, if you will, brought about her exile to Babylon.

Vs. 2 begins with "Thus says the Lord" almost immediately after "says the Lord" of the previous verse. You'd think hearing this incessant command through Jeremiah would impact the people not just now but further back in her history. Unfortunately it seems to have little effect because most are so blinded by their own propensity toward idolatry they might as well be deaf. The Lord continues to speak through vs. 6 and resumes with another "Thus says the Lord" in vs. 7 after which it goes through vs. 14 before another one appears. In the verse at hand the Lord through Jeremiah says that the people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness. *Saryd* is the noun for survivor as from a slaughter as in 42.17: "They shall have no remnant or survivor from the evil which I will bring upon them." No information is given as to the number of these survivors, perhaps not many, but they experienced in the desert something akin to what their forefathers went through in the Sinai wilderness after having departed Egypt. *Chen* is the word for grace, also as favor; the only occurrence in this book. "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; he bestows favor and honor" [Ps 84.11].

The same verse continues further implying the Sinai experience or when Israel had sought rest, *ragah* also connoting to terrify, to tremble. "(The Lord) who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar" [vs. 35]. Vs. 2 flows into the next one, the two being as one sentence. While so engaged in this *ragah*, the Lord appeared "to me" as the Hebrew text has it and does so from afar.

In the second sentence of vs. 3 Lord expresses freely his great love for Israel where the noun *'ahavah* (cf. 2.33 but not noted there) and the verb from which it's derived (*'ahav*, cf. 20.4) are used. Along with this he speaks of his continued faithfulness to Israel, that is, *mashak* his *chesed* (cf. 16.5), the verb fundamentally as to draw. Often *mashak* applies to drawing to oneself, not away, and implies that the Lord is drawing Israel back to himself in *chesed*, that untranslatable word whose New Testament equivalent is *agape*. "Then they drew Jeremiah up with ropes and lifted him out of the cistern" [38.13].

Vs. 4 begins with "again" which occurs a second time in the same verse as well as beginning vs. 5 implying that what the Lord is doing now he had done before. While listening to these divine words uttered through Jeremiah, the people couldn't help but find an echo in Ps 137.1: "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when remembered Zion." Now this memory of

Zion is about to be left behind, rather, fulfilled. The building (*banah*, cf. 24.6) which the Lord proposes takes place in the future and done by himself. More precisely, he does it passively as well, as it were: “you shall be built.” The second can imply participation by the people in this divine *banah* which applies not just to Jerusalem and other places but to the people themselves as a nation. And the Lord calls this nation a virgin or *betulah* (cf. 18.13).

The second “again” of vs. 4 applies to Israel celebrating the Lord’s intervention on their behalf which they do through dancing. This is followed immediately by a third “again” in vs. 5 when they shall enjoy the fruit of what they had planted.

Vs. 1 speaks of “that time” whereas vs. 6 mentions a day, a *kairos* if you will, when watchmen (the participle *natsar* as in 4.16 but not noted there) will call (*qara’*, cf. 20.8) in the hill country of Ephraim. Their purpose seems not so much as to warn about potential invaders but to mark various phases of the moon which determine the time for observing various feasts. In the case at hand they exclaim that the people are to go to Zion to worship the Lord.

As noted in vs. 2, what follows from “Thus says the Lord” continues through vs. 6; in vs. 7 it’s noted again and continues through vs. 14. You might say that both form a gap of sorts when Jeremiah is taking a pause to catch his breath and to see whether or not what he had just uttered has impacted his listeners. At the same time he knew well that shortly upon hearing his word, they will revert to their old ways. This case, however, is different, given that it is in the context of the Babylonian exile. Still—and this is a sore point with Jeremiah and rightly so—he knows instinctively that the people will forget this traumatic event quickly, let alone the Lord’s concern on their behalf.

As for vs. 7, what flows directly from the second “Thus says the Lord” is a command with four parts:

- 1) To sing with gladness for Jacob or *ranan* with *simchah* (cf. 51.48 and 15.16), the verb usually associated with shouting aloud.
- 2) Raise shouts or *tsahal* as in 5.8 but not noted there and translated as a horse neighing after someone’s wife. In the verse at hand, it’s for chiefs, literally “in the head of the nations.”
- 3) Proclaim or something like “make be heard” or *shamah* (cf. 29.24) which is coupled with
- 4) giving praise or *halal* (cf. 25.15). All four end up with the people saying that the Lord has saved his people (*yashah* (cf. 30.11) *who are* identified as being a remnant or *she’eryth* (cf. 23.3).

Vs. 8 begins with *hineh* or behold which is not unlike “Thus says the Lord” in the sense of being a means to get attention. The Lord will bring Israel from the north and farthest points of the earth meaning both Babylon and anywhere else that the people had been scattered or fled to escape going into exile. Included are those considered societal rejects such as the blind and lame together with women about to give birth. All form a great company or *qahal* (cf. 26.17 but not noted there), this word intimating a solemn, religious gathering.

In vs. 9 Israel will return with weeping or *bakah* (cf. 13.17) while at the same time the Lord will get involved by 1) leading them with consolations, literally with supplications or *tachanunym* (cf. 3.21)

and 2) making them walk by brooks of water meaning that the people won't lack for water. This implies that the people had a collective sense of being guided, albeit invisibly on a straight path (*derek*, cf. 26.13) without stumbling or *kashal* (cf. 18.13). This, of course, is reminiscent of Ps 23.3: "He leads me beside still waters (literally, 'waters of rest'); he restores my soul." In the verse at hand, note the three types of movement: come, walk and lead back or *bo'* (to come in), *yaval* (to conduct or bear along) and *halak* (to go). The Psalm verse just above uses the second.

Essential to all three is that the Lord is a father to Israel as vs. 9 continues, the preposition *l-* being used twice: "to Israel to father" as it reads literally. Also Ephraim is singled out as being the Lord's first-born referred to in vs. 20, the son of Joseph (cf. Gn 41.50-52).

Vs. 10 opens with "Hear (*shamah*, cf. vs. 7) the *davar* of the Lord," a slight variation on "Thus says the Lord" noted earlier, reference being upon *davar*. Here it's addressed to two groups of people: nations or *goy* (cf. 18.13) which is all-inclusive and coast lands or those bordering the Mediterranean Sea, the latter perhaps intimating ports where such *goy* chiefly from the west disembark and come to Israel. As for this area, the divine *davar* is to be declared (*nagad*, cf. 9.12). The message of *shamah* and *nagad*, of hearing and declaring concern the Lord who had scattered (*zarah*, cf. 5.11) Israel after which he gathered her (*qavats*, cf. 29.14). Once so assembled, he will keep them (*shamar*, cf. 17.21) as a shepherd, again reminiscent of the sentiment of Ps 23.

After the announcement to nations and coast lands in vs. 10, vs. 11 spells it out further in terms of the Lord having both ransomed and redeemed Jacob, *padah* and *ga'al*. For the former, cf. 15.21 and for the latter, 50.34: "Their Redeemer is strong."

Vs. 12 has a second instance of *ranan*, the first being in vs. 7 ('sing aloud'), the one at hand being on the height of Zion or most likely the temple. Such *ranan* makes the people radiant over the Lord's goodness. The verb is *nahar* which also means to flow and has echos in Ps 34.5: "Look to him and be radiant so your faces shall never be ashamed." *Nahar* has practical implications: a super-abundance of grain, wine and oil. Furthermore, in the same verse the life (*nephesh*, cf. 26.19; also as soul) of the people will resemble a watered garden which will preclude them from languishing. *Raveh* is the adjective with two other biblical references, one of which is Is 58.11 akin to the one at hand: "and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters fail not." This watering will preclude languishing or *da'av*. "For I will satisfy the weary soul, and every languishing soul I will replenish" [vs. 25]. Some of those being watered could not help but think of the Garden of Eden where "a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it became four rivers" [Gn 2.10].

Once so ensconced in Zion, vs. 13 speaks of the maidens and young men rejoicing, for the Lord will effect two turn-about, if you will:

1) Turn their mourning into joy or *'evel* into *sason* (cf. 16.11 and 15.16; the former not noted there)

2) Gladness for sorrow, *samach* into *yagon* (cf. 8.18). As for the former, it's used in this verse as "the maidens rejoice in the dance." In between these two we have the Lord comforting his people, *nacham* (cf. 26.13). The sentiment expressed in vs. 13 is reminiscent of Rev 21.4: "He will

wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain.”

In vs. 14 the Lord is feasting the singular soul or *nephesh* (cf. vs. 12), of the collective priests, the verb being *ravah* from which *raveh* in vs. 12 is derived as noted in conjunction with vs. 25. Compare this *ravah* with *savah* (cf. 5.7) concerning the people which implies pretty much the same but with emphasis more upon satisfaction. The former applies to drink whereas the latter more with being satisfied in the general sense although drink can be involved. *Ravah* applies abundance or *deshen* to the priests whereas *savah* applies divine goodness to the people. *Deshen* also means fatness associated with sacrifices, so it's a fitting term to be associated with priests. “Delight yourself in fatness” Is 55.2. *Tov* is the noun (same spelling as the adjective; cf. 2.7) for goodness or more specifically “my (the Lord's) goodness.” The conclusion of the section from vs. 2 through 14 ends with “says the Lord.”

The next or third instance of “Thus says the Lord” in this chapter is vs. 15, taking off from “says the Lord” in vs. 14. Vs. 15 is a somber interjection, if you will, within an otherwise joyous passage reminding the Israelites of the severity of their transgression and subsequent exile to Babylon. Here is one instance of this phrase which must have cut to the heart of the people.

Although the Lord is speaking and a voice (*qol*, cf. 30.19) is heard in Ramah, the two have some connection. Ramah is located just north of Jerusalem and is mentioned because those in the city were led through there en route to captivity in Babylon. It was close enough for the exiles to get one last glimpse of the capitol or what was left of it, a memory that was seared into Israel's collective memory throughout their time in Babylon.

Because Rachel was Jacob's wife and mother of Joseph and Benjamin as well as grandmother of Ephraim and Manasseh, the voice of this beloved matriarch couldn't help but be heard by her current children or those going into exile all the way to Babylon. Rachel's inability to be comforted or *nacham* (cf. vs. 13) applied equally to them. And so the near despair of this verse ends with the simple but stark warning regarding Rachel's children which can apply to the Israelites, “they are not.” As for Rachel's weeping, it continued to resound down to the birth of Jesus Christ where vs. 15 is quoted (cf. Mt 2.18) in conjunction with Herod having slain the male children. We could say that Rachel's *qol* finally was silenced with this tragic event.

Vs. 16 has the fourth instance of “Thus says the Lord” which speaks of a second *qol* (cf. vs. 15 for the first one), one of weeping, certainly a continued echo of Rachel. If prolonged, this would be too much for the people to bear and compels them to stop imitating her sorrow and distress. Not only that, the Lord takes it two steps further:

- 1) The work or *pehulah* of the Israelites shall be rewarded, *sakar* as a noun and also implies that which is for hire. References to these two are: Ps 17.28: “They regard not the works of the Lord” and Ps 127.3: “Lo, sons are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward.”
- 2) The Israelites will return (*shuv*) from the land of their enemies, that is, Babylon. *'Erets* (cf. 30.3) is the word for land and implies a close connection between the physical place and the

people dwelling upon it. So for Israel to leave the *érets* of Babylon means they are exchanging identity with it for their own *érets*.

Vs. 17 expresses hope for the future which parallels 29.11 where the same words *tiqvah* and *‘acharyth* are found, the instance at hand coupled with “says the Lord.” Then follows a promise of return for the children to their own country or *gevul* (cf. 17.3) which as border differs from *érets* or the previous verse. One could say that the *gevul* encompasses and protects the *érets*. Note that children are mentioned, not the generation in Babylon, which can imply that they or many of them won’t return but die in exile.

In vs. 18 the Lord singles out Ephraim, the son of Joseph, by paying close attention to him or as the text reads literally, “to hear I hear” (*shamah*; cf. vs. 10). That is to say, Ephraim is bemoaning his fate, *nod* (cf. 22.10 but not noted there) also as to agitate, to move the head, and continues through the next verse. However, this is a sign of repentance in recognition of having been chastened, *yasar* (cf. 30.11) as an untrained calf. *Lamad* (cf. 12.16) is the verb fundamentally as to teach and often used in conjunction with being instructed in the Torah. The desire of Ephraim to rectify his untrained character moves him to ask the Lord whom he acknowledge right up front to bring him back in order to be restored where the verb *shuv* (cf. vs. 16) is used twice.

In vs. 19 Ephraim speaks candidly by admitting the following three transitions in his life:

1) *Shuv* -> *nacham* (cf. vss. 18 and 13) or turned away -> repented.

2) *Yadah* -> *saphaq* (cf. 29.11 and 48.26 as to wallow) or instructed -> smote. *Saphaq* implies making a gesture of repentance.

3) *Bosh* -> *kalam* (cf. 17.13 and 3.3).

All in all, Ephraim had borne the disgrace or *cherpah* (cf. 24.9) of his youth. This cause the Lord to pose two rhetorical questions in vs. 20 not just to him but to the other Israelites. Indeed, Ephraim is the Lord’s dear son and darling child, *yaqyr* and *shahashuhym* being the adjectives. The former is found only here in the Bible and is similar to *yaqar*, also the same. The latter is a noun (plural) meaning delight. “Your testimonies are my delight” [Ps 119.24]. Even though the Lord may *davar* against Ephraim (the preposition *b-* or ‘in him’), he continues to hold him in remembrance, *zakar* (cf. 17.2). Furthermore, the Lord says that his heart yearns for Ephraim and will have mercy upon him. *Mehym* (cf. 4.19) is a noun in the plural meaning heart or more specifically, belly or bowels (compare with the more common *lev*, also as senses, affection). In the same breath the Lord says that he will have mercy on Ephraim, literally, “to have compassion I am having compassion,” the verb being *racham* (cf. 30.18). It’s put this way to show the intensity of divine love which is capped off by “says the Lord.”

In vs. 21 the Lord turns attention to Israel as whole, bidding the exiles to leave traces of their exile into Babylon so they may retrace their steps home. It consists of way-marks and guideposts as well as taking care to note the highway on which they are walking. This is rendered literally as “put to your heart (*lev*, cf. 30.23)” both *derek* (cf. vs. 9) and *mesilah*, the latter being an embanked road. As for the latter, the words of Ps 84.5 couldn’t help but be on their lips: “Blessed are the men whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion” (The Hebrew lacks Zion).

Hopefully they would take up this song in reality as they returned home. As for the setting up of posts, etc., it must have been done secretly or towards the end of the line, for if the Babylonian captors discovered them, there would have been severe consequences. After having instructed the people to set up these markers, the Lord speaks of Israel as a virgin or *betulah* (cf. vs. 4), a term of endearment, and bids them to return or *shuv* (cf. vs. 18) to their cities.

Vs. 22 contains a rhetorical question, an echo of the sentiment in 3.14, with regard to the people wavering or their hesitancy in returning not so much to their native land but to the Lord. This hesitancy compels him to call them a faithless daughter, *shovav* (cf. 3.14) being the adjective which connotes backsliding (cf. its verbal root *shuv*). *Chamaq* is the verb which has one other reference, Sg 5.6: "I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone." Following this question intended to put the people on the spot while at the same time identifying them as a virgin, the Lord says that he has created something new or unheard of. He does this marvel on the earth, *'erets* (cf. vs. 16), suggestive of more than Israel but for all peoples: a woman protects a man, *savav* meaning to turn back or encompass (cf. vs. 39). In other words, the natural order is reversed.

Vs. 23 has the fifth instance of "Thus says the Lord" where he says that the people will recite the *davar* contained in the next verse upon having returned home. That is to say, once he has restored their fortunes, *shuv* echoing the same sentiment as in 30.18. The people will exclaim a blessing from the Lord, short but to the point, with regard to the holy hill, most likely Zion. It's called a habitation of righteousness, *naveh* (cf. 25.30) and *tsedeq* (cf. 22.29).

Vss. 23-34 are in prose form where the Lord continues his restoration of Judah and promises to satisfy (*ravah*, cf. vs. 14) any soul which is weary and languishing. *Nephesh* (cf. vs. 14) is used twice, one with regard to the adjectives *hayeph* and *da'av* (cf. vs. 12). A reference as to the former is Ps 63.1: "O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you as in a dry and weary land." Both are replenished or *male'*, the common verb to fill.

Vs. 26 stands alone, a kind of interjection where Jeremiah speaks for himself for the first time as though what he had uttered thus far was in a dream. Given the fact that he had been coming off with one round of condemnation after another, no small wonder he exclaimed that his sleep had been pleasant or *harav* (cf. 30.31 with a different sense of this verb).

Vs. 27 resumes Jeremiah's prophecy. The text doesn't say he went back into sleep or not. He begins with *hineh* or behold with regard to "the days are coming," a familiar way of getting attention. After having sown both Israel and Judah which united the kingdom, the Lord will watch over both as they grow and flourish, the verb for this watching being *shaqad* (cf. 1.11) also as to lie in wait with expectation. Having kept a close eye on the people's nefarious activities over a period of time, the Lord will continue his *shaqad* which will result in the people building and planting.

"In those days" of vs. 29 shows the contrast between the people's aberrant behavior and their response to having acknowledged it through a proverb current at the time and quoted in Ezk 18.2. The taste of sour grapes eaten by fathers is transmitted to their children who have to live with this bitterness. The problem, of course, is how to get rid of it. The Lord steps in and remedies this

intractable problem by saying that each person is responsible for his own sin and will pay a price for it by death.

Having set the stage in vs. 31 for personal responsibility, the Lord employs another *hineh* or behold with “the days are coming.” On this occasion the future indeterminate days represent the making of a new covenant (last mentioned in 22.9), the verb *karath* meaning to cut or to hew and usually associated with it (cf. 11.10 but not noted there). There’s a major different with this one, however. It won’t resemble the covenant “cut” long ago with Israel’s fathers when the Lord led them from Egypt, the image being a father taking the hand of a child. Reference, of course, is to the covenant in the Sinai wilderness with Moses being the chief representative. As the Lord reminds his people, they had broken that covenant, *parar* (cf. 11.10) implying to split, to divide. Furthermore, he puts it in terms of a marital relationship which made it equivalent to a divorce.

In vs. 33 the Lord begins to delineate the covenant he will make (*karath* again) but only after “those days” which refer to when the older covenant was in force. This time he will put (*natan*, to give; cf. 1.5) the *Torah* (cf. 26.4) within them, *qerev* (cf. 29.8) which implies their very center and from which they can’t escape. The Lord brings this a step further by promising to write the Torah upon their hearts. Note the uses of the two prepositions: *b-* prefaced to *qerev* and *l-* prefaced to *lev* (cf. vs. 21); i.e., “in” and “to.” As for the latter, it’s used four times to top of this verse: “to them,” “to God,” “to me” and “to people.”

Vs. 34 begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as “and” to show that the force of what the Lord has just said continues forward. Once the new covenant is in place, there won’t be a need for people to teach each other, *lamad* being the verb (cf. vs. 18) in reference to knowing (*yadah*, cf. vs. 19) the Lord, of having intimate knowledge both with and of him. The reason? Everyone will possess *yadah* (*dahath*, the noun) regardless of social status. Jesus quotes this verse in the context of identifying himself as the bread which had come down from heaven. To this he adds “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me” [Jn 6.45]. Jesus puts traditional stress upon first hearing followed by learning or the *lamad* at hand. Part and parcel of *lamad/yadah* is that the Lord will forgive the people’s iniquity and no longer keep in mind their sin, *salach* and the negative *zakar* working together (cf. 5.7 and vs. 20).

Vss. 35 through 37 resume the poetic form beginning with the sixth reference of “Thus says the Lord.” He’s identified as the Lord of cosmic powers, the sun, moon and stars used for marking time. Vs. 35 associates the moon with a “fixed order” or *chuqah* which also means a statute and similar to *choq* in vs. 36 (cf. 10.3 and 5.22 but not noted in both). So if the *choq* departs (*mush*, cf. 17.8 but not noted there) from before the Lord—this intimating the *choq* has some degree of autonomy—Israel’s descendants will likewise depart or cease from being a nation, also as before the Lord. In sum, Israel won’t have a lunar calendar, essential not just for telling time but for planting crops.

Vs. 37 has the seventh reference of “Thus says the Lord” and concludes with “says the Lord,” all this as in other instances to make sure the people are listening and not allowing their attention to drift. Here the Lord gives one of his most dramatic expressions of commitment to Israel. Should

both the heavens and earth's foundations be measured (which apparently they cannot), he will cast off Israel's descendants for their past deeds. The verb *ma'as* (cf. 8.9) is used with the preposition *b-* prefaced to *kal*, literally "in all."

"Days are coming" in vs. 38 signals a conclusion of Chapter Thirty-One which is prefaced with *hineh* or behold. He speaks of the city (Jerusalem though not named) being rebuilt and expanded. Included is a valley, most likely Hinnom (cf. 19.2+) where dead bodies have been cast. Instead of being cursed for this, it will be sacred (*qodesh*, cf. 2.3) to the Lord which fundamentally means set apart for the Lord.

1) na'am, mishpachah, 2) saryd, chen, ragah, 3) 'ahav, 'ahavah, mashak, chesed, 4) banah, betulah, 6) qara', natsar, 7) ranan, simchah, tsahal, shamah, halal, yashah, she'eryth, 8) qalah, 9) bakah, tachanunym, derek, bo', yaval, halak, 10) shamah, goy, nagad, zarah, qavats, shamar, 11) padah, ga'al, 12) ranan, nahar, nephesh, raveh, da'av, 13) 'evel, sason, samach, yagon, nacham, 14) nephesh, ravah, savah, deshen, tov, 15) qol, nacham, 16) qol, pehulah, sakar, shuv, 'erets, 17) tiqvah, 'acharyth, gevul, 18) shamah, nod, yasar, lamad, shuv, 19) shuv, nacham, yadah, saphaq, bosh, kalam, 20) cherpah, yaqyr, shahashuhym, zakar, mehym, racham, 21) lev, derek, mesilah, betulah, shuv, 22) shovav, chamaq, 'erets, savav, 23) shuv, naveh, tsedeq, 25) ravah, nephesh, hayeph, da'av, male', 26) harav, 28) shaqad, 31) karath, 32) parar, 33) natan, Torah, qerev, lev, 34) lamad, yadah, salach, zakar, 35) chuqah, choq, mush, 38) ma'as, 40) qodesh

## Chapter Thirty-Two

This new chapter begins with the *davar* of the Lord coming to Jeremiah, literally (as in other previous instances) "was to Jeremiah." Not only that, it was at a specific time during the reigns of two adversarial kings, Zedekiah and Nebuchadrezzar. A footnote in the **RSV** says that chronologically speaking, Chapter Thirty-Two should follow Chapter Thirty-Seven. While such observations are helpful to keep in mind, the document at hand operates on a different plane, reading the text through the lense of *lectio divina*. While this is the intent above and beyond all else, being reminded of historical elements from time to time are helpful. At the same time the *lectio* approach shouldn't be taken as an opportunity to deal loosely with the biblical text. As for the *davar* of vs. 1, Jeremiah doesn't utter it until vs. 6.

Vs. 2 continues to specify the time when the divine *davar* "was to Jeremiah," that is, during his confinement in the royal palace belonging to King Zedekiah. It must have been trying as he heard people rushing about and perhaps even the Babylonians in the distance as they attempted to breach the city walls. During that time or most likely when the siege made life most difficult the king asked Jeremiah about his prophesying. The king proceeds to mock him, throwing back his all too familiar stock-phrase "Thus says the Lord" along with his prophecy about Nebuchadrezzar. That is to say, the Lord has handed over Jerusalem into the hand of the king of Babylon. All Zezekiah has to do and wait for its fulfilment which is being acted out at the moment.

“Hand” is mentioned two more times (vs. 4), the idea being that no one can escape the “hand of the Chaldeans” and “hand of the king of Babylon.” After capturing Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar will meet one-on-one with Zedekiah and haul him off to Babylon. However, a glimmer of hope remains, namely, that the Lord visits him, *paqad* (cf. 30.20). Unknown to Zedekiah, he will suffer a terrible fate: “He (Nebuchadnezzar) put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in fetters...and put him in prison until the day of his death” [52.11]. Finally King Zedekiah finishes with his mockery of Jeremiah saying that any attempt to be victorious over the Chaldeans is doomed to failure, *tsalach* (cf. 22.29).

Perhaps this is one of the most difficult experiences of Jeremiah’s career as prophet. It was more so than his current imprisonment and even later when in the cistern (cf. Chapter 38) as he waited patiently to respond. As King Zedekiah expected and admittedly feared (though he tried to keep it to himself), Jeremiah begins with “the *davar* of the Lord was to me” as in vs. 1. To the king’s surprise, Jeremiah took a completely different direction, not rebuking him but discussing the purchase of land in his hometown of Anathoth. Woven among all this is mention of the noun *davar* on two occasions: 1) Jeremiah’s cousin Hanamel who visited him in prison “in accord with the *davar* of the Lord.” 2) Jeremiah knowing that Hanamel’s request to purchase the land was the *davar* of the Lord.

And so vs. 9 through 15 recount the business transaction which is more than purchasing a field as indicated by the prophetic words of “Thus says the Lord.” The transaction is a sign that houses, fields and vineyards will be bought and sold. There’s added the very important words, “in this land” or in this *érets* (cf. 31.22) which is more than the physical land but often synonymous with the nation of Israel.

After having handed over the deed of purchase—keeping in mind that Jeremiah is still in jail—he offers an extended prayer running through vs. 25. It may be outlined as follows:

-Vs. 17 begins with *‘ahah* or “Ah” which is both an expression of relief and joy despite Jeremiah’s imprisonment. Since God has made heaven and earth, nothing is too hard for him. The reads literally as “there is not wonderful from you all *davar*,” the verb being *pala’* which also means to be arduous, to be distinguished. “Is anything too hard for me” [vs. 27]?

-Vs. 18 is a continuous sentence from the previous verse. Actually it’s extended through vs. 20 beginning with divine *chesed* (cf. 31.3) which the Hebrew text says he “does” or *hasah* (cf. ‘made the heavens and the earth’ as in vs. 17). Although the *hasah* of this *chesed* is extended to thousands, the Lord requites guilt of fathers to the children. The verb is *shalam* along with the noun *havon* (cf. 25.14 and 16.18). Despite the outpouring of such *chesed*, any guilt remains hereditary and can’t be escaped easily.

-Vs. 19: Jeremiah extolls the Lord as great in counsel and mighty in deed, *hetsah* (cf. 18.23) and *halylyah*, the latter being found only here. Also his eyes are literally upon (*hal-*) the ways (*derek*, cf. 31.21) of men; he rewards each person in accord with his particular *derek*; *mahalal* (cf. 26.13) or doings is added as well.

-Vs. 20: Signs and wonders or *‘oth* and *mopeth* (cf. 10.2 and vs. 21) done in Egypt which, according to the NIV, echo Dt 26.8: “and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders.” Also, to this very day

the Lord has made a name for himself through Israel, referring to the many times he had rescued the people not so much from external enemies but chiefly from themselves.

-Vs. 21: A repeat of the previous verse as to the Lord delivering Israel from Egypt, signs and wonders mentioned again along with *mora'* or (great) terror. "Put them in fear, O Lord" [Ps 9.20]!

-Vs. 22: Giving Israel "this land" or the *'erets* (cf. vs. 15) on which the people are right now, the one flowing with milk and honey (cf. Ex 3.8).

-Vs. 23: When Israel took possession of the *'erets* given by the Lord, right away they did the following: 1) did not obey his voice or *shamah* (cf. 31.18) literally "in (*b-*) his voice" (*qol*, cf. 31.16), 2) did not walk in the *Torah* (cf. 31.33), another instance of the preposition *b-* and 3) failed to carry out what the Lord commanded them, *tsavah* (cf. 27.4). The result? Evil or *raha* (cf. 17.16) befell Israel.

-Vs. 24: The seeds sown already or when the Lord had delivered Israel from Egypt as recounted in the previous verse are manifesting themselves in the very present when the Chaldeans are besieging Jerusalem. In other words, what the Lord has *davar* is coming to pass.

-Vs. 25: Despite this dire situation, Jeremiah concludes his prayer to the Lord by saying it was he who made him purchase the field at Anathoth while the Chaldeans are about to take Jerusalem.

In vs. 26 or shortly after this extended prayer, the *davar* of the Lord "was" to Jeremiah, this verse beginning with the conjunctive *v-* which goes untranslated. It seems the Lord was waiting almost impatiently for Jeremiah to conclude the prayer so he could move on. He reveals this impatience in vs. 27 with *hineh* or "behold" followed by a rhetorical question which Jeremiah isn't expected to answer; it's designed more to both reassure him and put him in his place...something like he had done with Job. Then the Lord throws back to Jeremiah the words at the beginning of his prayer, that nothing is too hard for him where the verb *pala'* (cf. vs. 17 or to be marvelous is used along with *davar*.

Vs. 28 states what everyone knows by now, that King Nebuchadrezzar will take Jerusalem followed in the next verse by mentioning those housetops where people had offered incense to Baal. Obviously this provoked the Lord to anger, *kahas* (cf. 25.6). Note that Jerusalem isn't mentioned by name, "this city" being preferred as in earlier instances. It was almost too much for the Lord to utter the proper name Jerusalem, given the abominable practices that went on there. This is spelled out further in vs. 30 where the Lord complains that the people had done nothing but evil. What makes it worse is that they did it "in his sight" or with full awareness of their actions and consequences. That's why the Lord will remove "this city" [vs. 31] from his sight, evil having been perpetrated since it was founded. Once such incident the Lord must have had in mind is King Solomon who" built a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem" [1Kg 11.7].

This rejection is described further in vs. 33 where the Lord complains of the people having turned their backs to him, not their faces, so they could do their evil deeds supposedly free from him looking on. This, however, counters doing evil in his sight noted in vs. 30. Their shame, it seems, was almost too much for them to admit to themselves, yet they persisted despite being instructed (*lamad*, cf. 31.34) and not listening to divine instruction (*musar*, cf. 17.23). The former has the verb

*shakam* which translated literally reads “to teach them to rise early” which is similar to the rendering in 25.3. Instead, the people set up their abominations or *shiquts* (cf. 16.18) in the temple and built high places where they offered their sons and daughters. Even this the Babylonians must have found revolting.

From vs. 36 to the end of this chapter the Lord takes a positive stance beginning with “thus says the Lord.” His attention is toward not-named Jerusalem, again preferring “this city.” Despite having been conquered by King Nebuchadrezzar, the Lord will gather (*qavats*, cf. 31.10) his people to each and every place they had been scattered. However, they gave cause for manifesting his displeasure through his anger, wrath and indignation or *’aph*, *chemah* and *qetseph* (cf. 21.5, 25.15 and 21.5). In contrast to these we have a second mentioning of the Lord returning them home, that is, that they may dwell in safety or *betach* (cf. 23.6), this word also meaning trust.

In vs. 38 the people will become the Lord’s—meaning as of now they aren’t—where the preposition *l-* or “to” occurs four times in a short sentence: *l-* me, *l-* people, *l-* them and *l-* God. Nothing could be more thorough than that, really. From this verse through vs. 41 are a series of gestures the Lord will make, very much aware that the people can (and will) fall back into their evil ways. With this cautionary note in mind, they are outlined as follows and are found throughout other places in the Bible:

-Vs. 39: One heart and one way, *lev* and *derek* (cf. 31.33 and vs. 19) which are directed toward fear of the Lord. Note the added “forever” hopefully to counter the people’s seemingly inability to shake off their abominable practices. It’s for the benefit of the current generation and that of their children.

-Vs. 40: A covenant which is everlasting, similar to “forever” of the previous verse and again to counter backsliding. Here the Lord will put fear of him into the hearts of the people so they won’t turn from him.

-Vs. 41: Here the Lord reveals much of his true nature. Despite the people’s tendency to evil, he will do the following: 1) rejoice (*sus*) in doing them good. “In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches” [Ps 119.14]. 2) Make four gestures with the preposition *b-* or “in;” plant them *b-* this land, *’erets* (cf. vs. 22), *b-* faithfulness or *’emeth* (cf. 23.28), *b-* all his heart (*lev*, cf. vs. 39) and *b-* all his soul (*nephesh*, cf. 31.25).

Vs. 42 has two instances of the verb *bo’* (cf. 31.9) or to bring upon which has two different prepositions: *’el-* or literally “to” concerning evil (*rah*, cf. 26.13) and *hal-* or more properly “upon” with respect to good (*tov*, cf. 31.14). The Lord promises this good, *davar* being the verb.

The concluding verses of Chapter Thirty-Two speak of the buying and selling of fields, this signaling a return to normalcy. The very last words of this chapter sum up such practices, “I will restore their fortunes,” *shuv* and *shevyth* as in 29.14.

5) paqad, tsalach, 15) ‘erets, 17) pala’, 18) chesed, hasah, shalam, havon, 19) hetsah, halylyah, derek, mahalal, 20) ‘oth, mopeth, 21) mora’, 22) ‘erets, 23) shamah, qol, Torah, tsavah, rahah, 27) pala’, 33) lamad, shakam, musar, 34) shiquts, 37) ‘aph, chemah, qetseph, betach, 39) lev, derek, 40) sus, ‘erets, ‘emeth, 42) bo’, rah, tov, 44) shuv, shevyth

## Chapter Thirty-Three

Here the *davar* of the Lord comes (i.e., ‘was’) to Jeremiah a second time, the last being in 32.26 where it continues reverberating through the rest of that chapter. Apparently there’s a time gap between the conclusion of the first *davar* and initiation of the second one, otherwise we wouldn’t have it noted as such. Although Jeremiah never would acknowledge it, being *davar*-less must have been a relief. He had a chance to rest from having so often delivered a contentious message, some of which involving a threat to his own life. In the case at hand, Jeremiah would rather not have this interval because he’s still shut up in prison. All he had to do was sit there, the confinement being very difficult to handle compared with the freedom associated with the divine *davar*.

In vs. 2 this *davar* which “was” to Jeremiah speaks with the familiar “Thus says the Lord” here associated with having made and formed the earth. Earth isn’t mentioned in the Hebrew text, but we can assume it’s inserted here. In addition to this making or *hasah* (cf. 32.18) we have *yatsar* and *kun* (cf. 18.11,19.11 and 30.20), all three implying the exercise of great love and care. The words “the Lord is his name” at the end of this verse is a proud testimony of what he has done by associating it with his very name...a kind of seal of approval.

Vs. 3: *qara’* and *hanah* (cf. 31.6 and 14.7) or call and answer which work hand-in-hand with respect to the Lord; i.e., one effects the other simultaneously. The *hanah* following *qara’* results in the Lord telling things which are great and hidden or not known (*yadah*, cf. 31.34). Such is the result of divine telling or *nagad* (cf. 31.10) which is akin to Jeremiah’s relationship with the *davar* of the Lord.

Vs. 4 opens with the second “Thus says the Lord,” this oft-repeated phrase fleshing out the *nagad* or telling in the previous verse. In this instance “thus” pertains to the houses of “this city” (Jerusalem) and Judah which were torn down to make way for defensive positions against the impending attack by the Chaldeans. The Lord foresees this in vs. 5 where the Hebrew reads “They are coming in to fight against the Chaldeans.” As for these invaders, the Lord is using them to smite (*nakah*, cf. 5.3) his people in anger and wrath, ‘*aph* and *chemah*, both found together in 32.37. On this occasion the Lord is so horrified that he decides to hide his face from “this city.” Once again he’s too disgusted to use the proper name Jerusalem because of their wickedness or *rah* (cf. 32.42). As for the Chaldeans or any other foreign land the Lord deploys against Israel, chances are they don’t have insight as to being such instruments. However, some (especially commanders, etc.) could have an inkling that they were participants...not pawns...in a larger event. Perhaps once they had played

their role, they got a better overall picture enabling some, not all, to convert to Israel's religion.

In vs. 6 the Lord changes his tune abruptly with *hineh* or "behold." Such a sudden change would have been close to incomprehensible for the people to grasp if it weren't for this introductory warning, if you will. Instead of the wrath and fury at the hands of the Chaldeans, the Lord will restore the fortunes of Judah and Israel as in 32.44: *shuv* and *shevyth*, as well as rebuilding them or restoring them as they had been prior to their rejection of the Lord as mentioned in vss. 11 and 26. An essential component to this rebuilding is to have a king similar to David, be being the gold standard for his successors as commented upon frequently in First and Second Kings. Note that what the Lord says from vs. 6 through vs. 9 takes place in the future. In the meanwhile, the people are still stuck in their misery. As for what the Lord will do (i.e., in the future), it may be outline as follows through these verses:

- Bring health and healing, the verb *halah* (cf. 8.21) suggestive of going up with regard to 'arukah and *marpe*' (cf. 8.22 and 8.15). In the same breath the Lord says that he will heal as well as reveal (*rapha*' and *galah*, cf. 30.17 and 20.12) an abundance of prosperity and security or *shalom* and 'emeth (cf. 30.5 and 32.40).

- Restore the fortunes of both Judah and Israel, *shuv* and *shevyth* (cf. vs. 6) plus rebuilding them as they had been.

- Cleanse and forgive (*tahar* and *salach*, cf. 13.27 and 31.34) sins and rebellion.

- "This city" or Jerusalem as a name of joy, praise and glory: *sason*, *tehilah* and *tip'arah* (cf. 31.13, 17.14 and 13.11). It will be for the benefit of the nations or *goy* (cf. 31.10). Their response will be one of fear and trembling at the prosperity or *shalom* (cf. vs. 7) the Lord will bestow up Judah and Israel. Hopefully upon hearing of this the nations will ally themselves not so much with Judah and Israel but with the Lord.

Vs. 10 has the third instance of "Thus says the Lord" with regard to the people's response upon returning home as well as with respect to Jerusalem. Upon returning home they will find it a waste or *charev* found next in vs. 12, this noun connoting dryness. "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies in ruins" [Hag 1.4]? The desolation found there is intensified by the lack of sounds associated with a bustling, inhabited place. However, in vs. 11 the Lord says that this will chance with people singing a song of thanksgiving which echos Ps 136.1: "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever," *chesed* (cf. 32.18) being the central theme. This is followed by another mention of *shuv* and *shevyth* (cf. vs. 6). As we move through the Book of Jeremiah and get a more comprehensive view of Israel having forsaken the Lord and his willingness to receive them afterwards, the role of *chesed* becomes increasingly central and appreciated.

Vs. 12 continues the theme of abandoned places which will be restored with emphasis upon flocks repopulating them. Again, the future tense dominates these verses and continues for the rest of the chapter. Emphasis upon the future continues once again where vs. 14 begins with *hineh* or “behold” concerning future days which remain unspecified as in other occasions. Here the Lord will fulfill a promise made to Israel and Judah which reads literally as “I will make arise (*qum*, cf. 30.23) the good (*tov*, cf. 32.42) *davar* I *davar* (or made).” *Davar* puts the uncertainty of future days into perspective. That is to say, by reason of the eternal nature of the divine *davar*, the future is contained within the present or same time the Lord is uttering it.

Vs. 15 mentions again “those days” with the added “at that time,” this keeping in mind the synchrony between past, present and future with respect to *davar* of the previous verse. Here we have mention of the righteous Branch found in 23.5 or a branch (*tsemach*) which is righteous or *tsadyq*, a clear reference to King David and a successor to follow in his footsteps. There the similarly unspecified future rendered as “days are coming” is used with the verb *qum* or to arise. In the verse at hand, we have instead the verb *tsamach*, the root for *tsemach*. It is in the hiphil form, indicative of causation instead of the branch doing the rising. In sum, *tsamach* is imposed from without. A similar example: “There I will make a horn to sprout for David” [Ps 132.17]. Once this is done there follows execution of justice and righteousness by this Branch, *mishpat* and *tsedaqah* (cf. 30.11 and 23.6).

Vs. 16 mentions again “those days” when Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely, *yashah* and *shakan* with *betach* (cf. 31.7 and 23.6 for the second two). As for Jerusalem, it will be called “The Lord is our righteousness” or *tsedaqah* (cf. vs. 15). Vs. 17 continues the theme of King David as a model for the ruler-to-be (his name hasn’t been revealed yet) which is made more personal by addition of his name which makes it as though he were still alive and active. Never will he lack a man to occupy his throne accompanied by Levitical priests to make offerings in the temple.

Vs. 19 has the *davar* of the Lord coming to Jeremiah—“was to Jeremiah”—suggesting another pause of unspecified time between what had been said and what is about to be said or about to be *davar*. It’s in conjunction with the fourth instance of “Thus says the Lord.” The Lord is presenting an impossible scenario, an attempt to break (*parar*, cf. 31.32) the rhythm of day and night couched in terms as a covenant. However, should that impossibility come to be, the covenant made with David will suffer *parar*, and his descendants won’t occupy the throne. Vs. 22 continues the same cosmic imagery emphasizing the impossibility to number the heavenly host and sand of the sea. Similarly David’s descendants can’t be numbered along with the Levitical priests. Such words echo the covenant made with Abraham: “I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore” [Gn 22.17].

Vs. 23 has yet another pause in the action having the *davar* of the Lord coming or “was to Jeremiah.” The Lord now puts a rhetorical question to his prophet, asking if he has gotten wind of a rumor circulating among the people which consists of having rejected Judah and Israel, they being put in terms as families or *mishpachah* (cf. 31.3). In other words, the two families are no longer a nation (*goy*, cf. vs. 9) as far as they’re concerned...if they’re not a nation, they have lost any clout with surrounding peoples and are subject to be conquered. To this the Lord responds with the fifth and final “Thus says the Lord” of Chapter Thirty-Three. He returns to the image of rejecting (*ma’as*, cf. 31.38) his covenant made with the day and night. If the Lord went that route, the same will apply to the present descendants, bringing to mind the names of David, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In other words, he refers to that covenant noted above with regard to Gn 22.17. Nevertheless, this chapter ends on a quick, positive note almost as though the Lord had let his tongue slip and wishes to correct himself. That is to say, he will restore the people’s fortunes and have mercy upon them, *shuv* and *shevyth* as in vs. 11. Instead of *chesed* as in that verse, the verb here is just as touching, *racham* (cf. 31.20), to have mercy as coming from his inmost being or bowels.

2) hasah, yatsar, kun, 3) qara’, hanah, yadah, nagad, 5) nakah, ‘aph, chemah, rah, 6) shuv, shevyth, 7) halah, ‘arukah marpe’, rapha’, galah, shalom, ‘emeth, 8) tahar, salach, 9) sason, tehilah, tip’arah, goy, shalom, 10) charev, 11) chesed, shuv, shevyth, 14) qum, tov, 15) tsemach, tsadyq, mishpat, tsedaqah, 16) yashah, shakan, betach, tsedaqah, 20) parar, 23) mishpachah, 24) goy, 26) ma’as, racham

### Chapter Thirty-Four <sup>1</sup>

A new chapter with the *davar* of the Lord coming (i.e., ‘was’) to Jeremiah. It intimates a pause of indefinite length from what had transpired in the previous chapter. By now Jeremiah was very familiar with these divine visitations as well as adept at carrying out the *davar* entrusted to him. At the same time he’s fully aware that he will meet resistance. No matter how often this occurs, never can he get accustomed to it and can’t help but wonder privately, “When will it all come to an end?”

This time the situation is the most dramatic one of his prophetic career. King Nebuchadrezzar is assaulting Jerusalem and other cities; not just that, but he has at his disposal all the kingdoms under his dominion (rendered literally as ‘ruling of his hand’) which makes the siege all the more formidable. Chances are some if not most of these allies were there in a half-hearted way. They either join in the fight or face utter destruction.

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1 This note from the NIV is inserted for general information: “The first major division of the book (chs. 2-35) now comes to a close, Jeremiah’s warnings and exhortations to Judah are concluded with a historical appendix (chs. 34-35) as well. Ch. 52, written by someone other than Jeremiah, serves as a fitting historical appendix to the entire book.”

This *davar* is followed by the expected “Thus says the Lord.” Although the common verb ‘*amar*’ is used, it conveys the divine *davar* when used in such a formulaic mode of expression as expressed through a prophet. Jeremiah is to communicate the “Thus says the Lord” just given to him to King Zedekiah, a kind of mirror image where the *davar* goes from the Lord to Jeremiah to Zedekiah. This time the *davar* at hand begins with *hineh* or “behold.” The Lord is about to hand over Jerusalem to the Babylonians which again he calls “this city,” another instance of a barely veiled disgust.

In vs. 3 the Lord gets personal about the fate of King Zedekiah which must make Jeremiah especially uncomfortable as mouthpiece of the divine *davar*. He will be exiled to Babylon and won’t be put to the sword. Instead, he will die in peace or *shalom* (cf. 33.9). In fact, his memory is compared favorably with former kings whom people remembered by burning spices in their honor. Such people, of course, will accompany Zedekiah in exile to Babylon. The details of his future fate conclude in vs. 5 with the definitive “I have *davar* the *davar*, says the Lord.” So despite the impending destruction of Jerusalem, the death of many of its inhabitants and, of course, the ruined temple, King Zedekiah can take great comfort at being spared. Hopefully his serenity in the ensuing tragedy of the Babylonians capturing Jerusalem can become an example and assuage his subjects similarly exiled.

Vs. 6 begins in a somewhat formal way with “Jeremiah the prophet” who *davar* all these *davar* to King Zedekiah or what was recounted above and is prefaced with the conjunctive *v-* translated as “then.” It takes place while the Babylonians were in the process of fighting against Jerusalem. Following this double *davar*, if you will, comes another *davar* in vs. 8 when it comes (i.e., ‘was’) to Jeremiah. The occasion? Zedekiah had made or cut (*karath*, cf. 31.31) a covenant with the inhabitants of Jerusalem as to proclaiming liberty. The verb is *qara’* with the noun *deror* (cf. vs. 15) which also means a swallow or a free, abundant flow. For a reference similar to the one at hand, cf. Is 61.1: “To proclaim liberty to the captives.” This proclamation pertains to setting free slaves which during this crisis can be taken as a precautionary gesture insofar as such people might use the siege as an occasion to side with the Babylonians in the hope of escaping slaughter or exile. Besides, King Zedekiah had the advantage of knowing his future fate as prophesied by Jeremiah.

Vs. 11 begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as “but” to show as it usually does the close connection between an action accomplished and what is about to happen. Added to (or with) this conjunctive we have “after” which anticipates the quick change of mind the people showed with regard to the royal proclamation, this indicated by the verb *shuv* (cf. 33.11) or to turn around. *Shuv* is used a second time as if to show this double-take, that is, as “took back.” Apparently there was a brief...very brief...time when these slaves had been set free. Before they knew it, they were put back into captivity precisely due to the fear of internal rebellion.

This incredible, sudden turn of events in the midst of a siege leads to the *davar* of the Lord coming (i.e., ‘was’) to Jeremiah with another verse (i.e., 12) beginning with the conjunctive *v-* which goes untranslated. Following this *davar*, of course, comes “Thus says the Lord” with regard to a covenant had made...cut (*karath*, cf. vs. 8) with Israel when he had brought them from Egypt. Everyone was familiar with this, part and parcel to their tradition, but to be reminded of it now and under such circumstances was especially painful. It was even more so by mention of “house of bondage (*heved*, cf. 27.6)” with a direct connection to those slaves (*heved*) so recently set free and re-possessed.

In vs. 14 the Lord fleshes out this covenant by reminding people of what he had said in Ex 21.2 and Dt 15.1-2 about setting free fellow Hebrews at the end of six years who’ve been enslaved. Then the Lord continues to say that their fathers neither listened nor inclined their ears to him. Unfortunately this double form of denial is just as pertinent now as it was then, and everyone was keenly aware of it, indeed, shamefully so.

From vs. 15 to the end of Chapter Thirty-Four the Lord continues to say how the people first repented, quickly turned around and profaned his name, *shuv* and *chalal* (cf. vs. 11 and 16.18). As for the latter, it takes the form of enslaving fellow citizens. When reading this, one can’t help but feel sorry for the Lord who not only here but throughout the entire book of Jeremiah has put up and continues to put up with such stubborn resistance. He punishes a little here and a little there but always is ready to take back his wayward people.

Those who had transgressed the Lord’s covenant didn’t keep its terms, *qum* (cf. 33.14) and *davar*. This is put in terms of a sacrificial offering or having cut (*karath*, cf. vs. 12) a calf in two and passing in between them where the verb is used in the opposite sense of cutting a covenant. As a result, the Lord will hand them over to their enemies, the Babylonians at the gate, and their bodies will be food for wild beasts, etc. And so the Lord will destroy “this city” and make a desolation of the cities of Judah, *shemamah* (cf. 25.12).

5) shalom, 8) karath, qara’, deror, 11) shuv, 12) karath, 13) heved, 15) shuv, chalal, 18) qum, karath, 22) shemamah

### Chapter Thirty-Five

A new chapter with the familiar *davar* of the Lord coming (‘was’) to Jeremiah, this time with a different twist. The prophet is told to visit the house of the Rechabites, “house” implying the entire clan. First he is to *davar* with them—transmit the divine *davar*—and then bring them to the house of the Lord, second use of “house.” Thus one house is to go to another house or more specifically, a chamber adjacent to the temple. There Jeremiah is to

offer them wine which seems to be a way of offering hospitality and cutting any tension. However, it was against the Rechabites' custom. In brief, they comprise religious order which a footnote in the RSV says resembles the Nazirites. They were zealous for the old religious worship which had been in place going back to Israel once it had left Egypt and whose religious practices had been threatened when the people entered Canaan. In other words, Jeremiah was attempting to make peace with a group that had a somewhat fearsome reputation but willing to go all out in defending Israel against the impending Babylonian invasion.

And so Jeremiah goes ahead with the meeting, the two houses (Rechabites and the temple) coming together under one roof, as it were. Without missing a beat, they told Jeremiah that they refrained from drinking wine. This must have embarrassed him, having forgotten something that he should have known. It didn't seem like a good starting point for further dialogue. In an admirable yet somewhat archaic way the Rechabites recounted how they live (tents) but when King Nebuchadrezzar came against Jerusalem, took refuge there. On one hand this must have caused some tension among the inhabitants yet on another, were glad to have such defenders of the faith on their side in this hour of peril. At the same time their quasi-apocalyptic outlook must have welcomed the coming disaster, for it signaled a return to the old ways...or at least that was their hope.

In vs. 12 the *davar* of the Lord "was" to Jeremiah a second time, the conjunctive *v-* translated as "then." It came just in time too, for Jeremiah wasn't sure how to proceed at this point and was grateful for this support. Keeping in mind what the Rechabites told him in the sanctity of the temple precincts, this time when he addresses the people his attitude is different. In other words, he shares some of what these Rechabites hold dear.

In vs. 13 Jeremiah puts forth his communication from the Lord in a rhetorical question. It pertains to the people's willingness (or more accurately, unwillingness) to receive divine instruction (*musar*, cf. 32.33) and listen (*shamah*, cf. 32.23) to his *davar*, the two being pretty much one and the same. This is a lead-in, if you will, to where the Lord praises the Rechabites for their fidelity in their faithfulness to the Lord. In the meanwhile he had spoken persistently to the people, *davar* and *shakam* (cf. 32.33), the latter meaning to rise early. Then the Lord launches into what is a familiar refrain which the people would rather not hear, namely, that he had sent them prophets, again persistently (*shakam*). Their collective message echoing 25.4-6? Turn from evil (*rah*, cf. 33.5) ways, amend (*yataw*, cf. 26.13) your doings and don't go after false gods and serve (*havad*, cf. 30.9) them. Should the people do all three, especially the last, they will become slaves, for *havad* is the verbal root of the noun *heved* as in 34.13.

To this rhetorical question and the accusations that followed the Lord adds that the people failed to listen to him as well as inclining their ear. The two are combined as elsewhere to

drive home the failure to *shamah* (cf. vs. 13) along with “ear” being singular for the collective or people. I.e., one ear for the nation who failed miserably in this *shamah*. Vs. 16 follows up on this by the people not obeying the Lord, another use of *shamah* in comparison with the Rechabites who had followed through on this not just now but throughout their history.

Vs. 17 begins with *laken* or “therefore” which signals something the people would rather not hear but are forced to do so, for now their collective ear has no other choice. This isn’t said directly but implied. The Lord is about to bring evil or *rah* (cf. vs. 15) which he had *davar* against them (‘*el-* or literally ‘to them’), this echoing 11.11. The second part of vs. 17 again has *davar* along with *qara’* (cf. 34.8) or to cry out, a rather poignant way almost bordering upon desperation with another instance of the people not responding. Although the people keep on repeating their infidelity in one way and then another, it’s amazing to see how the Lord can put up with this. By now one wonders if there is a limit not just with the Book of Jeremiah but elsewhere. Perhaps a chief redeeming feature is that Jeremiah and other prophets have recorded such infidelity without making an attempt to conceal it.

The *laken* or “therefore” of the previous verse is countered in vs. 18 by the conjunctive *v-* translated as “but.” That is, the Lord says that the Rechabites had set an example with their obedience to their father Jonadab or through their *shamah* and *shamar* (cf. 31.10), keeping his precepts. In conclusion, vs. 19 adds a “Thus says the Lord” immediately following vs. 18 concerning Jonadab. Never shall he lack a man to stand before the Lord, literally as “to my face.” Such are the *davar* which are both encouraging and condemning at the end of this chapter.

13) *musar*, *shamah*, 14) *shakam*, 15) *shakam*, *rah*, *yatav*, *havad*, *shamah*, 16) *shamah*, 17) *rah*, *qara’*, 19) *shamah*, *shamar*

### Chapter Thirty-Six

Vs. 1 opens with the conjunctive *v-* which goes untranslated, coming immediately after Jeremiah’s dealings with the Rechabites. That chapter opened with “in the days of Jehoiakim” while the current one is pretty much the same but with the difference (and hence addition of the conjunctive) of “in the fourth year of Jehoiakim.” In other words, *v-* carries over into the what can be the same period of time or better, the same crisis noted in a footnote of the RSV. There it speaks of the “portentous events” of 25.1-14” or the Babylonian crisis. Actually that permeates everything through and through for the moment and rightly so.

Jeremiah receives the *davar* of the Lord as “this *davar*,” the last phrasing of which is in 27.1. Actually *davar* as noun and verb occur very frequently in this chapter. When he hears it put as such, he must have said to himself something like “what now?” It turns out to be a scroll or *megilah*, first occurrence in this book or more specifically, the first of many occurrences only in Chapter Thirty-Six. Jeremiah is to write (*katav*, also as to inscribe; cf. vs. 6) in it all the *davar* which the Lord has *davar* against Israel and Judah as well as other nations (*goy*, cf. 33.24). Such inscribing is to cover a lot of territory: from the reign of Josiah (cf. 26.1) up until the present. However, we’re dealing with the divine *davar* at work here. It’s the same *davar* which frequently “was to Jeremiah” as noted numerous times and implies an immediate presence, he is able to accomplish it swiftly and without exertion. In this instance Jeremiah must have recalled the same command to Moses, using him as a template: “Write these *davar*; in accordance with these *davar* I have made a covenant with you and with Israel” [Ex 34.27].

Such inscribing is to be transmitted through hearing (*shamah*, cf. 35.19), for the Lord wishes this scroll presented as such as containing the evil he intends, *rah* and *chashav* (cf. 35.15 and 18.18). The verb implies plotting, the doing of something in secret with evil intent as is the case here. However, since this *chashav* comes from the Lord, the end is good, that each person turn from his evil (*rah*) way which results in the Lord forgiving (*salach*, cf. 33.8) his or her iniquity as well as sin (*havon* and *chata’th*, cf. 32.18 and 5.25).

Vs. 4 begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as “then” to show, as it usually does, the close connection between an event that just occurred and what follows. Here that connection consists of Jeremiah summoning his secretary Baruch (cf. 32.12 but not noted there) who is to write at his master’s direction all the *davar* which the Lord had *davar* to him. The reason for this becomes clearer as the chapter moves on. At first glance you’d think delegating Baruch to do the writing would give way for making mistakes. However, the *davar* from the Lord to Jeremiah and then on to Baruch is seamless. Hence no problem as to transmission of the *davar*, again with Moses in mind.

In vs. 5 Jeremiah tells Baruch the reason for delegating the task of writing the *davar* of the Lord, that he’s restrained (*hatsar*, cf. 20.9 but not noted there; also as to shut up) from going to the temple, the reason for which isn’t clear. Jeremiah must have had an urge to go, but this recent visit by the *davar* prevented him, the reason for which he couldn’t articulate to others but knew in his heart. Anyway, Baruch is to take his place and go there on a day of fast and read literally “in the ears” of all the people, remaining true to what his master had *davar*.

Next Baruch holds out the possibility—important to stress this instead of the certainty—that the people will offer supplication to the Lord, *techinah* implying grace as well as mercy. “Let my humble plea come before you” [37.20]. Such a plea might...just might..result in the

people (i.e., plural) turning from their evil (*rah*, cf. vs. 3) way (i.e., singular), *derek* being noted last in 32.39. If they do this, they'll escape what the Lord has *davar*—the negative side of *davar*—which is tied in with his anger and wrath, both *'aph* and *chemah* as in 33.5. And so Baruch followed through and read all the *davar* in accord with what he had been commanded.

Vs. 9 jumps ahead to a specific time or the winter during King Jehoiakim's reign when the Babylonians were making a move against Ashkelon. The people assembled in Jerusalem and proclaimed (*qara'* as to cry out; cf. 35.17) a fast literally "to the face of" the Lord. In other words, this fast took on a life of its own by boldly being right in his face. It was on this occasion mentioned in vs. 6 that Baruch read the *davar* from the scroll literally in the ears of the people as in vs. 5, this mirroring "to the face of" the Lord. Chances are they knew Baruch had a long association with Jeremiah as his secretary and were accustomed to him doing the reading.

Among the crowd was Micaiah who upon hearing all the *davar* of the Lord, rushed to inform several princes who refrained from attending along with five singled out by name plus a few others not named. One can just imagine them tucked away in both the king's house and in the secretary's chamber, that is, two stages removed from prying ears, as if this isolation could shield them from the divine *davar*. Nevertheless, according to vs. 13, Micaiah communicated the *davar* pronounced by Baruch within this self-imposed protective shield. Their response was what you'd expect. Immediately they sent Jehudi to fetch Baruch, have him sit down and read it himself which he did under pressure, not knowing what would happen to him upon finishing. All the while he was putting his trust in the *davar* he was reading. Actually this is the second time the assembled princes heard the *davar* of the Lord, Micaiah being the first and Baruch the second.

Upon hearing the *davar*, the princes were terrified, *pachad* (cf. 30.5) intimating dread, and rushed off to inform the king. The way vs. 16 puts it, their fear is so intense, "they turned to one another in fear" or literally, "each man to his neighbor." But before hastening to the king, they wondered how Baruch had written all these *davar*, surmising correctly that they came from Jeremiah although his name isn't mentioned. It seemed they were just afraid of Jeremiah as they were of the *davar*. To Baruch's relief, the princes commanded him as well as Jeremiah to hide themselves.

Vs. 20 begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as "so" when the princes who visited Baruch went immediately to see the king, having handed over the scroll to his secretary for safe keeping while reporting all the *davar* to him. They did this directly, not reading from the scroll itself, for such *davar* had the power to be present regardless of how long or complicated they happened to be. Right away the king send for the scroll, vs. 21 beginning with the conjunctive translated as "then," indicative of the swiftness of action involved.

His assistant proceeded to read it not just to the king but to the princes, the same delegation that had just read the scroll meaning they were hearing it for the second time. While it was being read, King Jehoiakim took his seat. He isn't mentioned by name throughout, possibly out of contempt by the hostility he had toward Baruch and in actuality, Jeremiah. Mention of the ninth month and winter house signify coldness not just of the season but of the overall atmosphere.

Adding to the dramatic effect of this coldness, an assistant by the name of Jehudi was reading the scroll, and having completed several columns, the king cut them off and cast them into the fire. The overall impression is that he did this in slow motion for greater effect. Vs. 24 takes pains to say that Jehoiakim and the princes weren't afraid of the *davar*, not even rending their garments as one would expect. Although the princes and other assistants felt the warmth of the fire nearby, to them it was as cold as that time of the year. Three men—they were either princes or royal advisers—urged their master not to continue burning the scroll which infuriated the king which, of course, was burning slowly away. This prompted him to send for Baruch and Jeremiah but were unable to be found because as vs. 19, the princes told them to hide. Nothing is said whether Jehoiakim suspected the princes which testifies to the completeness of their scheme to protect Jeremiah. If the king found out, God help them.

Vs. 27 begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as “now” which is another indication of the fast-paced action at hand. We have the *davar* of the Lord coming again to Jeremiah after having mentioned that the *davar* conveyed to Baruch. Even before this happened, Jeremiah had an inkling that the Lord would ask for another scroll on which he'd write the same *davar* as the first. With Moses again in mind (cf. vs. 2), Jeremiah recalled exactly such *davar* and accomplished it at once and with ease,

Now for the first time since vs. 9 Jehoiakim is mentioned by his proper name instead of being referred to as king and is done so by the Lord himself, vs. 29 beginning with “Thus says the Lord.” In this same verse the Lord puts in Jeremiah's mouth a rhetorical question for the king as to why he had prophesied about the king of Babylon's invasion which will cut off both man and beast, the verb being *shachat* (cf. 18.4) also as to corrupt. Right away in the following verse (30) we have another “Thus says the Lord” directly addressed to King Jehoiakim who won't have any successor to sit on the throne of David. The very mention of this archetypal king by which all others are judged is the ultimate condemnation. At the same time it intimates that while something bad is in store for Jehoiakim and his descendants along with Israel itself, the seat of David somehow will put through.

This chapter draws to an end with the Lord having pronounced (*davar*) that evil or *rah* (cf. vs. 3) for all intensive purposes has come into effect. Nevertheless, no one would hear

(*shamah*, cf. vs. 2) it. So it seems that here as well as throughout the Book of Jeremiah (and further down the road) we have the ever recurring theme of *rah* = no *shamah*.

The last verse of Chapter Thirty-Six begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as “then” as it speaks of a third scroll which Jeremiah gave to Baruch. As noted earlier, Jeremiah was able to do this in accord with Moses’ writing the *davar* of the Lord with full accuracy and precision, let alone speed. Interestingly there are similar *davar* added which aren’t detailed here but certainly must pertain to the response (and ultimate) fate of King Johoiakim and Israel.

2) megilah, katav, goy, shamah, 3) rah, chashav, salach, havon, chata’th, 5) hatsar, 7) techinah, derek, ‘aph, chemah, 9) qara’, 16) pachad, 29) shachat, 31) rah, shamah

### Chapter Thirty-Seven

This new chapter starts off with King Nebuchadrezzar having established a new ruler, Zedekiah, in Judah to take Johoiakim’s place, this being foretold in 36.30: “He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by night.” Then vs. 2 brings up—regurgitates is an apt way of putting it—something all too familiar by now. Neither he, his servant nor the people listened to the *davar* which Jeremiah *davar, shamah* (cf. 36.31) another term we’ve encountered many times before. One wonders what Nebuchadrezzar thinks about all this or even if it had registered with him. Perhaps the most he thought of it was some kind internal wrangling among the Israelites about their religion and a crazed prophet.

One of the first acts of King Zedekiah is to send for Jeremiah and ask his prayers, *palal* (cf. 14.11) being the verb implying to judge or to intercede. Then vs. 4 gives a status report on Jeremiah, if you will, who at this point hadn’t been imprisoned. This is put interestingly enough as “he came and went in the midst of the people,” *betok* indicating the very center of the people. Apparently Pharaoh of Egypt’s army had come to the king’s assistance, he being under siege by the Chaldeans who withdrew at the report. As for Jeremiah’s intercession, the text doesn’t explicitly associate it with this development. This concurs with a note in the RSV: “the inhabitants concluded that a deliverance as in the days of Hezekiah had occurred, but Jeremiah warned them that such optimism was wholly unwarranted.”

Vs. 6 begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as “then” to show, as it always does, the close connection between what had just happened and what comes quickly on its heels. Here it applies to the *davar* of the Lord which came (‘was’) to Jeremiah followed by the customary “Thus says the Lord.” Jeremiah is to see the king who made the request to

inquire of Jeremiah, *darash* (cf. 30.17) fundamentally as to tread and thus intimates a certain desperation and urgency, certainly the case at hand. Jeremiah is to unpack the divine *davar*, namely, that the Egyptians will return home and the Chaldeans will come back and capture Jerusalem, “this city.” Most importantly, King Zedekiah isn’t to deceive himself with false hopes, least of all his people, the verb *nasha’* and noun *nephesh* as found in 4.10. The Lord concludes this warning with even sterner words. Even if Israel could defeat the Chaldeans, they will rise up once more and burn “this city.”

When the Chaldeans withdrew from their siege of Jerusalem, Jeremiah took advantage of this lull to set off for his home town to take care of some family business or as the RSV puts it, “get his portion (labeled ‘obscure’) *betok* or “from the very midst of his people.” He felt now was a good time when the *davar* of the Lord would leave him alone, every temporarily, but such was not the case. A sentry mistook Jeremiah for deserting to the Chaldeans on whose side apparently he had favored or such was the popular opinion. If it were any other inhabitant, things may have turned out differently, but here was the prophet himself who had talked openly so much about the impending siege and fall of the city. Naturally the princes were enraged who then beat and imprisoned Jeremiah. So once again he couldn’t take a vacation even for a brief time from his role of prophet. He was thrust back into an all too familiar situation where the *davar* of the Lord would make use of him though initially such thoughts were far from his mind.

Vs. 16 says that Jeremiah remained imprisoned “for many days,” perhaps far longer than he had anticipated. Given the situation, you’d think that King Zedekiah would have visited him sooner but did not. No reason is given; perhaps he was afraid to get an unfavorable prophecy yet again. Finally he questioned Jeremiah secretly, literally “in his house in secret” or *seter*. “Then King Zedekiah swore secretly to Jeremiah” [38.16]. He wasn’t a bit concerned whether Jeremiah was deserting or not but wanted to know if he had received any further *davar* from the Lord. Jeremiah responded directly and in matter-of-fact fashion as he had done earlier that Zedekiah will be handed over to the Babylonians. Then Jeremiah questioned the king as to why he had been cast into prison, claiming that he had done no wrong. He threw in a rhetorical question as to the whereabouts of prophets who prophesied that the king of Babylon won’t come against Israel. No answer, of course, was presented.

Chapter Thirty-Seven concludes with Jeremiah pleading that King Zedekiah do not send him to the house of Jonathan the secretary who’d put him to death. The king relented and kept him where he was, feeding him some bread until it ran out because of the siege. In the meanwhile, Jeremiah could hear the commotion both within the city and without, feeling completely helpless at not being able to move. One wonders what his captors thought as the Babylonians tightened the noose even more. Furthermore, where was the *davar* of the Lord now?

1) shamah, 3) palal, 7) darash, 9) nasha', nephesh, 17) seter

### Chapter Thirty-Eight

This new chapter is part of a larger whole dealing with Jeremiah's imprisonment which is why vs. 1 begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as "now," the usual sign of a close connection between an event that had transpired and one about to take place. Four men are mentioned by name in this opening verse who most likely were visitors, even associates, to see Jeremiah. The text at hand takes pains to say that they had heard (*shamah*, cf. 37.1) the *davar* which their friend had been speaking, *shamah* being the first word of this opening chapter. Such rare obedience suffices to mention their names: Shephatiah, Gedaliah, Jucal and Pashhur. This is joined with the usual "Thus says the Lord." As applied to just four people, *shamah* stands in sharp contrast to the entire nation of Israel not listening to the divine *davar*. I.e., a hint, if you will, at the notion of a remnant that many of the prophets speak of.

The *davar* as treasured by names are worth mentioning by reason of their *shamah*—is spelled out through vs. 3 and perhaps repeated aloud among them to ratify this *shamah*. Anyone who remains within Jerusalem shall perish, but whoever goes out to the Chaldeans shall live, his life being a "prize of war," *shalal* as in 21.9. In other words, they will become spoil or booty. It's a foregone conclusion ('Thus says the Lord' again in vs. 3) that Jerusalem will be taken by the Babylonians.

Vs. 4 has the princes asking King Zedekiah for Jeremiah to be put to death because his *davar* were in danger of weakening the resolve of the soldiers defending Jerusalem, *rapha'* (cf. 33.7) implying to be slack, to let down. They were, of course, playing on the king's fear and how Jeremiah had foretold how the Babylonians would capture him. In reality they were more fearful of their own lives. At once Zedekiah concedes, saying that he's unable to do anything against them, for the princes had him just where they wanted him. Right away (this is conveyed by the conjunctive *v-* translated as 'so' in vs. 6) they took Jeremiah and cast him into a cistern dramatically described as empty of water but full of mud into which he had sunk. Nothing is said of a stench, but surely it must have been awful.

However, a eunuch by the name of Ebed-melech, sympathetic to Jeremiah and perhaps associated with his four friends mentioned in vs. 1, heard of this. He rushed off to King Zedekiah and begged for Jeremiah's rescue. He relented, telling the eunuch to go ahead with his plan. Apparently Zedekiah had a change of heart somewhere along the line which must have enraged the princes. After all, he said in vs. 5 "the king can do nothing against you."

Vs. 14 begins with the conjunctive *v-* which goes untranslated, intimating that King Zedekiah rushed to see Jeremiah at the third entrance of the temple, a supposedly secret place away from the princes' prying eyes. He posed a question which he had longed to ask to which Jeremiah gave one condition, that he not be put to death. Zedekiah concurred to which Jeremiah responded in vs. 17 with "Thus says the Lord." By now the king was familiar—too much so for his taste—with these words which brought up old, familiar scenarios from the past, ones he'd rather leave there. As he feared, Jeremiah told him to surrender to the king of Babylon who will spare not just his life but those in Jerusalem. The alternative, of course, does not have to be made known. It was very obvious. Zedekiah was thinking primarily of his own life and blurted out that he was more afraid of the Jews who had deserted to the Chaldeans than the Chaldeans themselves. Jeremiah reassured the king, provided that he obey or *shamah* (cf. vs. 1) the voice of the Lord, *qol* (cf. 32.23) being used as a more emphatic expression of *davar*. Again, we have an example of the importance of *shamah* vis-a-vis *davar*, of hearing/obeying the word of the Lord.

In vs. 21 Jeremiah presents King Zedekiah with the option he was aware of fully, that failure to be attentive to this *shamah* will lead to a vision he had which interestingly is put in terms of a *davar*, again stressing the importance of *shamah*. The *davar* consists of women in the house of the king of Judah who were led out to the king of Babylon. Most likely they were concubines very much prone to gossip and palace intrigue. This is reflected in a ditty they expressed in vs. 22, namely, that the king's trusted friends had deserted him, and his feet were stuck in mire, most likely referring to Jeremiah's experience in the cistern. Nothing could be more embarrassing for the king when such women publically announced what supposedly had been kept secret. Everyone knew, of course, but now it was being played out before everyone.

In vs. 23 Jeremiah gets personal. King Zedekiah's wives and sons will be taken by the Chaldeans, he included as prophesied earlier. Then the king told the prophet to keep quiet about all this, especially should the princes discover their meeting. However, should they find out, Jeremiah is to say that the king responded to his plea that he wouldn't return him to the house of Jonathan to die. Obviously the princes got wind of the conversation—it was virtually impossible to hide even under the conditions of a siege—and things worked out well for Jeremiah. However, the Chaldeans were at the gate while this drama was being played out. In the meanwhile, the king, princes and everyone inside Jerusalem were holding their breath awaiting the fate in store for them.

1) *shamah*, 2) *shalal*, 4) *rapha'*, 2) *shamah*, *qol*

## Chapter Thirty-Nine

This new chapter begins with reference to the length of reigns of the two antagonists, King Zedekiah and King Nebuchadrezzar, a way of setting up the final climax or fall of Jerusalem. It's zeroed in further for increased drama in vs. 2 regarding Zedekiah: eleventh year, fourth month, ninth day of the month. Just about everyone expected it, for there's no mention of the city's inhabitants resisting the Babylonians. This is intimated in vs. 3 by their princes sitting in the middle gate along with military officers. Upon seeing them, King Zedekiah became terrified and decided to escape accompanied with other soldiers, making their way outside Jerusalem under cover of darkness. Unfortunately they failed to *shamah* the *davar* of Jeremiah, this action sealing their fate.

Vs. 4 describes the escape route outside Jerusalem. However, the Chaldeans got wind of this, pursued them and took them captive. Now it was up to King Nebuchadrezzar to pass sentence, this being rendered literally as "to *davar* judgment" or *mishpat* (cf. 33.15). It was an awful judgment indeed. First they slew Zedekiah's sons and then blinded him, hauling him off to Babylon, most likely in some kind of animal cart. Thus the very last thing Zedekiah had seen was the death of his sons and worse, that he would have nobody to succeed him on the throne. During the long trip to Babylon he couldn't help but regret not heeding...not *shamah*...the *davar* of the Lord uttered by Jeremiah. Now he was to live out his days as a trophy of sorts as well as a living admonishment to any ruler who might attempt to challenge the might of Babylon.

After having burned the house of King Zedekah, Nebuchadrezzar carried into exile the inhabitants along with those who earlier deserted to him. The two groups must have been kept separate, otherwise they'd be at each others' throats. However, Nebuchadrezzar gave order for his captain of the guard to leave some poor people, *dal* being the adjective as found last in 5.4. They were given vineyards and fields not out of pity but as non-threatening inhabitants to maintain and cultivate the land. Actually, they turned out to be better off than expected and ultimately received the exiles upon their return from Babylon. Hopefully the four friends or associates of Jeremiah—Shephatiah, Gedaliah, Jucal and Pashhur—are among those left behind.

As for Jeremiah, in vs. 11 the king put him in charge of the same captain of the guard who was to treat him well and not do him any harm or *me'umah* along with *rah* (cf. 36.31) or evil, the same. As for the former, it's found in vs. 10 concerning the poor left behind, those "who owed nothing." Even better than this, the captain was to do anything Jeremiah should *davar* him. And so Jeremiah was handed over to Gedaliah, who in turn, was to take him home. Vs. 14 end with "So he dwelt among the people," suggesting that the prophet didn't go into exile and *betok* as in their very center. On one hand it must have been difficult not to be with the exiles while on the other, a relief to remain at home despite the destruction wrought by the Babylonians. Once he and those *dal* in vs. 10 among whom he

resided had recovered, they could organize and form a working community. Such is the meaning of Jeremiah being in their *betok*.

Vs. 15 has the *davar* of the Lord coming to Jeremiah confined in the court of the guard, this most likely being a part of Jerusalem not destroyed. It was a familiar *davar*, one addressed to the eunuch Ebed-melech who had rescued him from the cistern (cf. 38.7). The contents? That the Lord will fulfil his *davar* for evil or for *rah* (cf. vs. 12) against Jerusalem and will do so the very day they are uttered, not surprising given the circumstances. However, Chapter Thirty-Nine closes on an upbeat note. The Lord will save Ebed-melech despite being a prize of war, *shalal* as in 38.2 for having trusted in him.

5) mishpat, 10) dal, 12) me'umah, rah, 16) rah, 18) shalal