

Basic Judaism Course

By: Rabbi Noah Gradowsky

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SYLLABUS

GREETINGS AND OVERVIEW

Welcome to the Basic Judaism Course. I am delighted that you have chosen to take this very important step towards your personal development as a Jewish person. The goal of this course is to familiarize you with many of the basic elements of Jewish practice, culture, and history.

I have designed this course to hit many of the important facets of Jewish life. Generally, I hope that each topic will be covered in one or two sessions. However, it is more important to me that each of you get a good understanding of the given topic, and that we satisfy any curiosities that come up. Therefore, we will welcome your comments and questions, even if they seem to go a bit far afield. In fact, you will even find that the handouts for each class address many tangents. Hopefully, these tangents will give you a more broad-based understanding of Judaism. If you feel that the class is moving too slowly, or getting too sidetracked, please address those concerns to me, and we will try to shift the focus a bit.

This course will probably be a little more than basic. This way, even if you know a thing or two about Judaism, I think you will get a lot out of this course.

CLASS TOPICS

I plan to cover the following subjects during this course (in approximately this order):

- The Siddur (prayer book). This will be our first topic.

- Other commandments, including:
 - o Tefillin
 - o Mezuza
 - o Tzitzit
 - o Blessings on food
 - o Other blessings
- The Sabbath and Jewish holidays
- Kashruth
- Jewish Literature from the Torah to Today
- Life cycle events
- Synagogue skills and behavior
- Jewish denominations
- Jewish history
- The National Jewish Outreach Program's Level II Hebrew Reading Course

Throughout this course, we should consider the following questions:

- What are our beliefs about God and how God desires for us to behave?
- What is *Halacha* (Jewish law), and how do we determine *Halacha*?

The handout material for this course will have many footnotes and discussion sections. These are fairly important, as they capture many of the important facets of Jewish law and religion. Text in shaded sections contains information which I found interesting to share, but are far more tangential.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Along with this course, I recommend the following resources for more information. Throughout the course, I will refer to pages in these resources that discuss our topics, using the abbreviations indicated. Most of these resources will be available at a Jewish bookstore, or likely also at a regular bookstore. They are also readily available online. Bargain hunters may care to compare prices by going to www.addall.com or www.campusi.com. If there is significant interest, I can look into putting together a group order.

- To Be A Jew (TBAJ) by Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin. A great book which summarizes many of the important facets of Judaism in a very readable manner. ISBN: 0465086241 (cloth), 0465086322 (paperback).
- To Pray as a Jew (TPAAJ) by Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin. A great guide to all prayer services – weekdays, Sabbath, and holidays. ISBN: 0465086284 (cloth) 0465086330 (paperback).
- A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice (Klein) by Rabbi Isaac Klein. This is a fairly complete discussion of all facets of Jewish laws and observances. Rabbi Klein was one of the great *halachists* of the Conservative movement of the past generation. His work does include many of the decisions of the Conservative movement's Committee on Jewish laws and Standards, with which I generally disagree. However, as an accessible guide to Jewish law, this work is second to none. ISBN: 0873340043.

- The Art Scroll Siddur (AS): This prayer book is written from a very Orthodox perspective. However, it is by far the most user friendly siddur out there. It includes all the stage direction – when to stand, when to sit, when to bow, what page to turn to next, etc. It also has lots of commentary and explanation (although their comments must often be taken with a grain of salt). I recommend the "RCA Edition," which includes prayers for the US government and for the State of Israel, <http://www.artscroll.com/Books/srca.html>, ISBN 0899066623.
- The Temple Israel Website's "Extras" section <http://www.templeisraeloflb.org/Extras.html> has many great resources. I find the Jewish Virtual Library <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.com> to be particularly excellent. They have a thorough glossary. Also, click on their "The Library" and then "Religion" and then "Judaism" for lots of great pieces about Judaism.

I will also refer to Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History by Ismar Elbogen (Trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin), ISBN 0827604459. Elbogen's books is one of my favorites, though it is highly academic and by no means a "beginners" book. For the Jewish literature section, the material will be based on Encyclopedia Judaica CD-ROM edition article "Jewish Literature." And "The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion," ed. Werblowsky & Wigoder, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1966, which I also used in preparing this text.

LIVE IT, LEARN IT

As with all subjects of study, discussion and learning can only go so far. One cannot truly understand Judaism without experiencing it. Of course, I would love for everyone to be fully observant of Jewish law. However, we know that we are not all (yet) in that situation. However, I think it is very important that you experience the Judaism that we are discussing. You may find that what you once thought would be difficult turns out to be meaningful and relaxing. In order to get a full flavor for what we are studying, I would encourage you to try as many of the following as possible:

- **Attend all types of synagogue services.** Of course, I would love for people to become regular attendees of minyans. But at the least, try to “collect the whole set” of these services. You may be surprised to learn that not all synagogue services start at 9:00AM and go to around noon. Here are the different types of services you could attend:
 - Weekday morning services without Torah Reading: Sunday & Holidays: 8:30, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday 7:15. Approximate length: 30 minutes.
 - Weekday morning services with Torah Reading: Monday, Thursday: 7:00. Approximate length: 45 minutes.
 - Weekday evening services: Based on sundown.
 - Friday evening services (“Kabbalat Shabbat”): Based on sundown. Currently 4:15 PM. Approximate length: 1 hour, with lots of lively singing.
 - Saturday morning services: 9:00AM Approximate length: 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ hours.
 - Saturday afternoon services: Based on sundown. Approximate length: 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ hours, including a light meal.
 - Holiday services: including:
 - Sukkot
 - Simchhat Torah
 - Purim
 - Passover
 - Shavuot
 - Tisha B’av
- **Pray at home:** There are many benefits to praying in synagogue (more on that during our “Guided Tour to the Siddur”). However, at its basic level, the obligation to pray can be fulfilled by praying anywhere (you haven’t lived until you pray the afternoon service at a highway rest stop). After we have completed the “Guided Tour,” and equipped with a helpful siddur such as Art Scroll, you should be able to do the synagogue service. I will be happy to guide you along. Remember that you can always pray in English or in Hebrew.
- **Say shema in the morning and evening.** This is a very important *mitzvah* that can be done in a matter of minutes.
- **Observe a Sabbath:** Many people think that Sabbath observance would be burdensome. You’ll find that in fact it is relaxing and rejuvenating. Pick a Sabbath that you will try to observe completely (we’ll be learning what this involves). It is important that you plan your Sabbath time, including synagogue

attendance and special meals (if you can get to my apartment, I'll be happy to invite you for a meal).

- **Shabbat home ritual:** Light Shabbat candles before sundown (you can look at This Week @ Temple Israel or our website for the time). Make Kiddush over wine/grape juice, and *hamotsee* on challah (we'll learn all about these rituals). Enjoy a great meal. Try to do the same thing for Saturday lunch (kiddush is a bit different, and there are no candles). Then, on Saturday night 45 minutes or more after sundown, do Havdallah. Try to make these rituals a regular occurrence in your life.
- **Try keeping a kosher home for two weeks:** We'll learn about keeping kosher. Especially living in New York, it's not as tough as you think. You don't need to kasher your home (more on what that means later in the course) for this trial period. Just buy only kosher foods, and don't cook/serve any combinations of meat and milk. Wait at least 3 hours (some people do 1 hour) after eating meat before you eat anything dairy. Try out some of the great kosher restaurants our area has to offer (I can make recommendations).

ON GENDER NEUTRALITY

Modern society has taught us, I believe correctly, to be highly sensitized to gender biases that are inherent in the way we speak and act. I shall do my best to be sensitive to these issues. However, when I translate text, I am often forced to use gender specific terms so as to best capture the linguistic style of the writing. This is especially true of Hebrew, which makes heavy use of pronouns or assumed nouns. One could translate using a proper noun, however, this sense of propriety comes at a cost of accuracy, a price I am often unwilling to pay. This is especially problematic as it often forces me to translate references to God using a masculine pronoun, which is both potentially offensive, and worse yet a gross injustice to a religion that staunchly rejects associating human features to God. Heaven forefend that we should think of God as either male or female. However, when Kaddish says *May His great name be sanctified and magnified*. I feel that a translation of *May God's great name . . .* would misrepresent the text. Therefore, any gender specific translations during this class should be understood as a necessary evil of translating from one language to another.

ADULT BAR/BAT MITZVAH

Participants in this course are welcome to be a part of this class simply for the learning, or in anticipation of an adult Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony. If you are interested in participating in an adult Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony, either on your own or along with others, please speak to me.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you would like to speak to me outside of class time, feel free to call or stop by at my office. I do not keep official office hours, so it makes sense to call to make sure I am here. The synagogue number is (516) 432-1410. You can reach me on my cell phone for emergencies, or for any time-sensitive matter: (917) 686-0552. I can be e-mailed at RabbiNoahG@templeisraeloflb.org or contacted by AIM at [RabbiNoahG](#).

A GUIDED TOUR TO THE SIDDUR

By: Rabbi Noah Gradowsky

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Maimonides¹, in his section on Laws of Prayer in the Mishneh Torah, introduces the idea of prayer as follows:

מצות עשה להתפלל בכל יום שנאמר ועבדתם את ה' אלהיכם, מפני השמועה למדו
שעבודה זו היא תפלה שנאמר ולעבדו בכל לבבכם אמרו חכמים אי זו היא עבודה
שבלב זו תפלה.

It is a positive *mitzvah*² to pray each- day, as it is said (Exodus 23:25) "And you shall worship the Lord your God." From tradition the sages learned that this service is prayer, as it is said: (Deut 11:13, part of the second paragraph of Shema) "and to serve God with all your heart." The sages said: what is service with the heart? Prayer.

Thus, at its core, prayer is service of God through our hearts (i.e. emotions).

Rabbinic literature (see e.g. Babylonian Talmud³ Berachot 26b) also indicates that prayer is meant as a reflection of the animal sacrifice that were made in the **בית המקדש** (*Beth Mikdash*), the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

It is also worth noting that the Hebrew word for prayer, **תפילה** (*tefillah*) means "self judgment." Thus, when we pray, we talk not only to God, but to ourselves. As much as we give thanksgiving to God, and ask God for help in the future, we also use prayer for introspection - reminding ourselves of our personal responsibilities.

¹Rabbi Moses Maimonides (AKA Moses ben (son of) Maimon, or by his acronym RaMBa"m) (1135-1204). Rabbi and philosopher. Authored a commentary on the Mishnah (a compilation of rabbinic teachings from the late 2nd century), a code of Jewish law known as the Mishneh Torah, and famed philosophical work, "The Guide to the Perplexed."

² Mitzvah: Literally "commandment." This is used to refer to any action that is required by Jewish law. However, it is often used more generally as meaning "a good deed."

³ Babylonian Talmud: Document of discussions of rabbis concerning Jewish law, philosophy, legend, etc. compiled somewhere in about the 5th or 6th century in Babylonia (modern day Iraq). Often referred to as "The Talmud," as opposed to a similar compilation, the "Jerusalem Talmud" which was likely completed around the beginning of the 5th century. The Talmuds both function as a commentary on the Mishnah (defined at footnote 4).

WHO IS SUPPOSED TO PRAY?

The Mishnah⁴ (Berachot 3:3) says that women (as well as men) are obligated to pray. However, there is significant debate as to how far this obligation goes. According to some, women are merely obligated to pray once a day, and do not need to follow any set text such as the *Amidah* (defined below). According to others, women are obligated in exactly the same way as men. Though the evidence is not at all clear, at the moment I lean towards the school of thought that women are of equal obligation to men.⁵

STUDYING JUDAISM WITH HONESTY AND INTEGRITY

This is the first time during this course that we are encountering the idea of different rules that apply to men and women in Judaism. This is one of several areas of Jewish law which, quite understandably, upsets people. Philosophically, some view such laws as divine fiat. Others view such laws as the result of the sociology in which Judaism was born, but view such laws as nonetheless binding until today because Jewish law is, at least in certain respects, not subject to amendment. There are those who would choose to ignore or hide these difficulties. Still others will simply dismiss and eliminate these difficulties by changing Jewish practice. We will do neither. We will do our best to explain Jewish life fully and honestly, even if we might find certain facets to be difficult. Let us remember that learning about Judaism is a *mitzvah* (a commandment), and therefore should be done with intelligence and honesty. As my teacher Rabbi Halivni puts it, we must combine אמונה צרופה ויושר דעת - *genuine faith with intellectual honesty*. One cannot survive without the other. Without intellectual honesty, our faith is not in God, but in ourselves. Religion becomes not a matter of faith, but a matter of our own desires. This is true whether we impose upon Judaism an “orthodox” belief that is

⁴ Mishnah: A compilation of rabbinic statements about Jewish law compiled in the late 2nd century by Rabbi Judah the Prince. Theories vary as to the purpose of the work - it is either a law code, a school book, or a bit of both. Together with the Gemara, which is a commentary on the Mishnah (one produced in Babylonia, one in Israel), it makes up the Talmud (the “Babylonian Talmud” and the “Jerusalem Talmud.”). These are main sources of Jewish law.

⁵ At the risk of getting too complicated (yes, I know, it's too late) there is a class of commandments referred to as *שזהן גרמא* Mitzvot Ushah Zahman Germa, “positive time bound *mitzvas*.” These are commandments that have a particular time constraint. Under Jewish law, women are generally exempt from these commandments (although there are many exceptions), presumably because their domestic responsibilities in the Ancient Near East were considered burdensome enough. So, the question is: When the Mishnah says that women are obligated to pray, does it mean that there is a general obligation of prayer to which women are obligated, or is it that prayer, despite its time constraints, is still entirely obligatory upon women.

Note that even if they are not obligated to do a certain *mitzvah*, they are allowed to do that *mitzvah*, and are praised for doing so (See Maimonides Mishneh Torah, Laws of Tsitsit 3:9, Beth Yoseph Orach Chayim 17 s.v. “aval rabbenu tam” quoting Ra”n). There are those who say that there are certain *mitzvot* which women should not perform, such as wearing a *Talit* or *Tefillin*. I have yet to see a cogent and convincing argument of those positions.

inconsistent with the evidence available to us, or if we reject Jewish practice or beliefs based on our own desires.

The discussion on how we deal with difficult parts of Jewish practice is a fascinating one, and is welcome. There are many different approaches. We may also care to discuss this subject with the other Rabbis who participate in our “Introduction to Jewish Denominations.” Personally, I believe that it is OK to struggle with this issue. Where Jewish law is clear, I believe that we must accept Jewish law as the command of God. Otherwise, paraphrasing my teacher Rabbi Yuter, Judaism becomes not the command of God, but the command of our own intuition, which to my mind is not religion at all. Sometimes, however, the troublesome practice is more a matter of common practice, and not a matter of Jewish law, in which case, under the right circumstances, there is room for change.

If this is a topic that interests you, you may also care to read my letter regarding women’s roles in Temple Israel, available on the Rabbi section our synagogue website: <http://www.templeisraeloflb.org/Rabbi.html>.

WHY ARE WOMEN AND MEN TREATED DIFFERENTLY IN THE SYNAGOGUE?

First, we must acknowledge that the Talmud, which forms the basis for Jewish law, creates different rules for men and women. Some will argue that this is *de facto* the will of God. Others will argue that this is a result of the sociology at the time the Talmud was put together. To what extent a change in sociology may lead to a change in Jewish law is a fascinating question of legal philosophy. Putting that question aside, it is worth noting some of the *halachic*⁶ background.

First, we must note that many times when someone acts as the prayer leader, they are reciting prayers on behalf of the rest of the congregation. In *halacha*, in order to represent someone else, one must be at an equal level of obligation to do the prayer. Thus, if person X is required to pray the afternoon service, while person Y is not, person Y may not do the afternoon service on behalf of person X. Since a woman’s obligation for prayer may be less than that of a man (and certainly is a lesser obligation for Shema, as we will see in below section on Shema p.26), there are problems having a woman represent the community for these prayers.

Another factor was, frankly, the rabbis felt a certain discomfort with women performing certain public rituals. Thus, while the Talmud acknowledges that a woman may be called at least for certain *aliyahs* to the Torah, it says that this should not be done because of “the honor of the congregation.”⁷

⁶ Halacha: Jewish law.

⁷ Babylonian Talmud Megillah 23a. Even in Orthodoxy, there are some who have begun to question whether a new sociological sensitivity may be sufficient to override this rabbinic opinion, or whether a congregation may waive its honor in this regard. See e.g. “Qeri’at ha-Torah by Women: A Halakhic Analysis” by Mendel Shapiro, available at http://www.edah.org/backend/JournalArticle/1_2_shapiro.pdf. Frankly, I have yet to conclude as to whether I agree with their arguments entirely.

HOW OFTEN DO WE PRAY AND WHEN?

It depends on the day. Every day, there are at least three prayer services: *Shacharit*, the morning prayer, *Mincha*, the afternoon prayer, and *Ma'ariv* (AKA *arvit*), the evening prayer. Oftentimes, as a matter of convenience, we combine the afternoon and evening service. This is why you will sometimes hear people talk about "*Mincha/Ma'ariv*."

THE REAL JEWISH STANDARD TIME

NOTE: Please ignore this section if it confuses you. I always found this idea fun.

Any old Basic Judaism class would tell you about praying in the morning, afternoon, and night. But this isn't any old basic Judaism course. This is basic Judaism through the eyes of a geek. And Judaism has got some fun math. For instance: *Shacharit* should be done by the 4th hour of the day. What does that mean? Four hours after sunrise. Four - sixty minute hours you ask? Noooooooooo. That would be way to easy.

Judaism gauges time in what is called "relative hours." We split sunlight hours into 12 equal parts. So, if there are 12 hours of sunlight in the day (say during the equinox), then *Shacharit* should be done within 240 minutes of sunrise (10:00 AM). But, say the sun rises at 7AM, and sets at 5 PM. Then there are only 10 hours (600 minutes) of sunlight in the day, and a relative hour is 50 minutes long. *Shacharit* should be done within 200 minutes of sunrise (= by 10:20).

How do I know when sunrise is? Do I have to do the math to figure out when the fourth hour end? Well, you can always look in the paper for sunrise and sunset, and do the math. Remember: Math is fun. Alternatively, you can go to <http://www.myzmanim.com> and put in your zip code. There are also many computer programs and publications that can tell you what the timing of the given day is.

Though *Shacharit* should be done by the fourth hour, if one prays *Shacharit* after the fourth hour, but before the end of the 6th hour (i.e. before the midpoint of the sunlight hours), one has fulfilled their obligation to do *Shacharit*, but has not done it in its optimal time.

Mincha may be done starting 1/2 relative hours after midday (12:30 if it is an equinox) until sundown. *Ma'ariv* may be done any time after sundown (the rules are actually a bit more complicated than this, but even I won't burden you with more. Therefore, synagogues often have a "*Mincha/Ma'ariv*" service around sundown, so that they can cover both bases.

Ma'ariv should be done after Sundown, preferably before midnight (i.e. before $\frac{1}{2}$ of the time between sunset and the next sunrise has passed). If one has not done so, *Ma'ariv* can still be done until sunrise.

On general weekdays, these prayer services aren't terribly long. About 1/2 hour in the morning, and 1/2 hour for the afternoon and evening services combined. Less time if you pray at home rather than with a *Minyan*⁸.

On the Sabbath they take a little more time. Below, you will find an outline of each of these services.

On Shabbat, holidays, and *Rosh Chodesh*⁹, when there used to be sacrifices in the Temple, there would be an additional sacrifice for the holiday. This was known as the *Musaf* (additional) sacrifice. Today, when we celebrate holidays, we add a fourth prayer service, called *Musaf*. *Musaf* should be done by the end of the 7th hour of the day (see the above box on Jewish Standard Time), but may be done up to sunset.

On Yom Kippur, a fifth service is added, called *Neilah*, which means “closing,” a reference to the closing of “the gates of prayer,” so to speak.

ALL PRAYERS MAY BE DONE IN ANY LANGUAGE

Though we prefer Hebrew, this is only when we know what we are saying. Otherwise, God understands sincere prayer in whatever language. It is, of course, a good idea to try to learn what some of the prayers mean, and thus be able to do them in Hebrew.

WHY DO MEN AND WOMEN SIT SEPARATELY IN SOME SYNAGOGUES?

The *mechitzah*¹⁰ has been a part of the Jewish synagogue for many years. Exactly how many is subject to debate. There is no source in the *Torah* or in the *Talmud* which requires such a separation. It seems to have been created out of a sense of cultural propriety, and a desire to avoid distractions during prayer.

I feel it important to make one thing clear at this point. As I discuss above, “Studying Judaism With Honesty and Integrity” p. 10, there are certain inequities between men and women in Jewish law. **I want to stress that the *mechitzah* is not one of those inequities.** The *mechitzah* separates, to be sure, but it does not judge. Unfortunately, many synagogues have a *mechitzah* that treats women as second class citizens. This is a function of the synagogue and architecture, and not of the Jewish idea of separating people so as to avoid distraction. The *mechitzah* in the Temple Israel Beth Midrash avoids this problem, by having the Women’s section in front of the Beth Midrash.

WE PRAY IN PLURAL

⁸ A quorum of 10 men. More on that later.

⁹ Rosh Chodesh: The beginning of each Jewish month. For some months, the final day of the previous month is also celebrated as *Rosh Chodesh*.

¹⁰ Mechitzah: “Division.” Refers to something (a wall, balcony, etc) which separates men and women during prayer.

With limited exception, our prayers are said in plural, e.g. “Hear our prayer,” “forgive us,” “heal us.” We pray not only for ourselves, but for all others. This reflects a sense of communal responsibility, and our caring for others.

WHAT IS A MINYAN?

Minyan essentially means “quorum.” This refers to the requisite 10 men (in certain liberal forms of Judaism women are counted as well, see comments above “Studying Judaism With Honesty and Integrity” p. 10). There are certain prayers, called *devarim shebikdusha* “holy matters,” which may only be recited with a Minyan. Where this is the case, it will be noted in our outline of prayer services.

WHAT ARE THEY MUMBLING?

Not all of our prayers are done aloud. Many chunks of the prayers are done silently, with the *Chazan*¹¹ reading the last part of each paragraph aloud, in order to help people keep pace. In many prayer books, there is a marking towards the end of the paragraph, which indicates where the *Chazan* usually breaks in. In the Art Scroll siddur, this is marked by four dots in a diamond shape.

KADDISH

Note: For this section I rely on TPAAJ p. 216-226, as well as Elbogen p. 80-84.

Kaddish is a prayer for God’s dominion over the world. Originally (presumably around 2,000 years ago), it was used at the end of a sermon/lecture. The practice was that each sermon would end with words of consolation, i.e. a reference to the messianic age, and then often the lecturer would say a prayer. Kaddish was one such prayer, and became standardized as the closing prayer for sermons. The text of that Kaddish was likely similar to what we know of as “*Kaddish Derabanan*,” the Rabbi’s Kaddish.

The opening words of Kaddish, **יְתִגְאַל וַיְתַקְדֵּשׁ שְׁמָה רֶبֶּא** *May His great name be sanctified and magnified* reflect the words of Ezekiel 38:23: **וְתִגְדַּלְתִּי וְתַקְדִּשְׁתִּי וְנוֹדַעְתִּי לְעֵינֵי גּוֹיִם רֶבֶּי** *I shall sanctify and magnify myself and shall make myself known in the eyes of the many nations, and they shall know that I am the Lord.*¹²

The climax of Kaddish is its refrain **אָמֵן יְהֹא שְׁמָה רֶבֶּא מָכְרֵךְ לְעוֹלָם וְלְעַלְמֵי עַלְמֵי** *Amen, may his great name be blessed forever and ever.* This phrase echoes Daniel 2:20 (“Daniel responded and said: ‘may the name of the Lord be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and greatness are His.’”) and Psalm 113:2 (“May God’s name be blessed for ever and ever.”), as well as the words

¹¹ **Chazzan:** Cantor. This refers not necessarily to a professional cantor, but to whoever functions as the leader of the particular prayer service. Another term often used is shaliach tsibur (known also by the acronym sha”ts), which means “the representative of the congregation.”

¹² **ה’** Is used in many printings instead of writing out God’s name. It is generally pronounced *a-donay*, although sometimes is pronounced *e-lohim*.

ברוך שם קבוץ מלכותו לנצח ועד *may the name of his glorious kingdom be blessed forever and ever.*

Kaddish, in several forms, developed to be used in prayer services as well, probably because it speaks of God's praises being beyond all "blessings, songs, and praises." Eventually (it seems around the 13th century or so) Kaddish became a mourner's prayer. According to Elbogen, Kaddish made sense as a mourner's prayer because its prayers for God's kingdom were connected with ideas of resurrection. Other reasons why people feel Kaddish is appropriate as a mourner's prayer are discussed in TPAAJ. For instance, it can be seen as a way for the mourner to express acceptance of the divine judgment. Second, there is a notion that a person's good deeds, when done on behalf of another (particularly a parent), are meritorious for that person in the world to come. Reciting of Kaddish, was considered such a good deed.

Kaddish is said by the *Chazzan* or in the case of Mourner's Kaddish and the Rabbi's Kaddish, it is said by mourners (more on that below).

Note that Kaddish is not a Hebrew prayer. It is written in a form of Palestinian Aramaic.

Let's look at Kaddish and its different versions. Note that we are looking at the standard Ashkenazi¹³ text of Kaddish.

THE HALF KADDISH

The Half Kaddish is the base of the Kaddish. All other Kaddishes have this text, followed by some other parts. The Half Kaddish generally serves as a divider of different parts of the service, and as the introduction to the *Barechu*¹⁴.

יְהִיגָּל וַיְתַהֲדֹשׁ שְׁמָה רֶבֶא.
May his great name be sanctified and magnified.
(congregation responds) Amen אָמֵן

בָּעוֹלָמָא דִי בֶּרֶא כְּרֻעָותָה
וַיִּמְלִיךְ מֶלֶכְוֹתִיה
בְּחַיִכּוֹן וּבְיוֹמִיכּוֹן
and may his kingdom reign
in our lives and our days

וּבְמַיִּדְךְ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל
and in the lives of the whole house of Israel
בַּעֲגָלָא וּבָזְמָן קָרִיב
speedily and at a close time

וְאָמַרְוּ אָמֵן.
And say: Amen.

אָמֵן יְהֹא שְׁמָה רֶבֶא מְבָרֵךְ לְעוֹלָם וּלְעוֹלָמִי עַלְמִיא.
(Congregation responds) Amen, *may his great name be blessed forever and ever.*

¹³ Ashkenazi(c): Jewish communities of Eastern Europe, as opposed to Sephardic communities, which hail from Spain and other Mediterranean areas.

¹⁴ Barechu: Call to worship, discussed below p. 34.

יְהִרְאָךְ: נִיְשַׁפֵּחַ וַיִּתְפָּאֵר וַיִּתְגַּנְשֶׁא נִיְתְּהֻכֵּר וַיִּתְعַלֵּה וַיִּתְהַלֵּל
Blessed, praised, glorified, raised up, exalted, adored, and lauded be

שְׁמָה דָּקָרְשָׁא
His holy name

(congregation responds) *blessed be He.*¹⁵ בָּרוּךְ הוּא.

לֹעֲלָא מִן כָּל
Above all

בְּרָכָתָא וּשִׁירָתָא פִּשְׁבָּחָתָא וּנְחַמְתָּא
blessings, songs, praises, and consolations which are said in the world.

כָּאָמַרְנוּ בָּעֵלָמָא.
And say: Amen.

(congregation responds *Amen*)

THE MOURNER'S KADDISH

The Mourner's Kaddish is recited at various points in the service, generally after the reciting of particular prayers (e.g. *Alenu*), or a chapter of scripture, particularly psalms. It is recited by those in mourning,¹⁶ and those who are observing a *yahrzeit*,¹⁷ with the congregation responding where indicated. The Mourner's Kaddish begins as does the Half Kaddish, and then adds:

יְהִיא שָׁלוֹם רַבָּא מִן שְׁמֵינָא
May there be great peace from the heavens
וּחַיִם עַלְינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל
and life¹⁸ upon us and all Israel

וְאָמַרְנוּ אָמַן.
And say: Amen.

(congregation responds *Amen*)

עוֹשֵׂה שָׁלוֹם בָּמְרוּמָיו
Who makes peace in His heights
הֽוּא יִעָשֵׂה שָׁלוֹם עַלְינוּ
may he make peace upon us
וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל
and upon all Israel

וְאָמַרְנוּ אָמַן.
And say: Amen.

(congregation responds *Amen*)

¹⁵ In Sephardic ritual, the leader says these words as well, and the congregation responds "amen." According to some, this phrase should be parsed and translated "Blessed, praised . . . be the name of the holy one, blessed be He."

¹⁶ We will discuss mourning more completely in our unit on the life cycle. Originally, Kaddish was recited for 12 months after the death of a parent. Many, myself included, believe that this should remain the practice. Others have reduced the term to 11 months based on a belief from Jewish mysticism that an evil person suffers in *gehenim* (the Jewish version of Hell) for 12 months, so that saying Kaddish in the 12th month might belie an expectation that the lost loved one was suffering in *gehenim*. Today, many people will say Kaddish for loved ones other than parents, often for a period of 30 days after the burial (some for 11 or 12 months).

¹⁷ *Yahrzeit*: The anniversary (on the Jewish calendar) of a loved one's death.

¹⁸ The Sephardic version says "good life."

It has been noted that these two sentences are fairly redundant, the first being in Aramaic, the second in Hebrew. Scholars are at a loss to explain this repetition. In any event, the sentiment reflects the words of Job 25:2 “*Dominion and fear are with him, who creates peace in His heights.*”

It is customary for those reciting Kaddish to take three steps backwards (left foot first) before saying this last line “Who makes peace,” and to bow to the left while saying “**עוֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם בָּמָרוֹמָיו**” to the right while saying “**הַוָּא יִעֱשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עַלְינוּ**” and to the center while saying “**וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל**.” After saying Amen, take three steps forward (right foot first).



עוֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם בָּמָרוֹמָיו
(bow to left)



הַוָּא יִעֱשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עַלְינוּ
(bow to right)



וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל
(bow to center)

THE FULL KADDISH (KADDISH TITKABAL)

The Full Kaddish is recited by the *Chazzan* towards the end of each prayer service. It has the same beginning as Half Kaddish. Then it adds a special line that asks God to accept our prayers. This line, which starts with the word **תִּתְקַבֵּל titkabal**¹⁹ gives the Full Kaddish its other name: “*Kaddish Titkabal*.” After this sentence, the Full Kaddish ends with the same ending as Mourner’s Kaddish.

May the prayers and supplications of all Israel be received

קָדֵם אֲבוֹהוֹן דַי בָּשָׂמִיא

And say: Amen.

(congregation responds Amen)

¹⁹ Some prayer books, including Art Scroll, have this word as **תִּתְקַבֵּל titkabeyl** which would be Hebrew, rather than Aramaic. This version seems incorrect.

THE RABBI'S KADDISH

The Rabbi's Kaddish ("*Kaddish Derabanan*") is the original form of Kaddish, and is said after reciting Rabbinic homily. There are several places in the prayer book where homily is added in order to allow for the saying of this form of Kaddish. This is a prayer about the rabbis, rather than being a prayer to be recited by Rabbis. *Kaddish Derabanan*, which is recited by those in mourning or observing a *yahrzeit* begins with the same content as the Half Kaddish. Then, the following prayer is added:

על יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל רְبָנָן.
And upon their students
and upon their students' students.
and upon all those who labor in the Torah
whether in this place
or in any other place.
may they and you have²⁰
shlemá Rabá
love, kindness, mercy
long lives
abundant food
and salvation
from their Father who is in heaven.
And say: Amen.
(congregation responds Amen)

After this paragraph, the Rabbi's Kaddish ends with the same ending as Mourner's Kaddish.

RULES AND PRACTICES REGARDING KADDISH

- Kaddish is recited only with a *minyan* present.²¹
- Whoever recites Kaddish should stand. In some circles, everyone stands for every Kaddish, in other circles this is not the case.
- Customs as to who says Kaddish vary widely, and will be discussed further when we discuss life-cycle events. It is my feeling that it is acceptable for any person to say Kaddish, including women and children (provided the child understands what God is).
- Though opinions vary, I feel that it is acceptable to say Kaddish for people other than parents/relatives.

²⁰ This speaks to the congregation.

²¹ See above "What is a Minyan?" above p. 14.

THE AMIDAH (AKA “SHEMONEH ESREH”)

For more on this section, see TPAAJ Chapters 3 & 4 and AS p. 98-102, 112-118. While reading this section, it may be helpful to refer to “*Amidah Blessings Chart*” on page 22.

Essentially, the *Amidah*²² is prayer. When we say that a person is obligated to pray three times a day²³, we mean that the person is obligated to recite the *Amidah* three times a day. Each prayer service has an *Amidah*. Originally, there was no set prayer such as the *Amidah*. People simply said their own prayers, and had some guidelines as to what they should say. Having a set text allows us to be sure we cover all the main themes of prayer. One is welcome and encouraged to add thoughts to the “middle blessings”²⁴ of the *Amidah*, as long as those thoughts stay within the theme of the blessing (blessing #16 is a catch-all – all thoughts and prayers can be added there).

THE BEGINNING AND END OF EVERY AMIDAH

Every *Amidah* begins with the word “My Lord, open my lips, so that my mouth may declare your glory,”²⁵ followed by the same 3 blessings praising God:

1. *Avot*: Praises God as the God of our forbearers, Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. (AS p. 98, TPAAJ p. 76-77).
2. *Gevurot*: Praises God’s might as one who controls nature and resuscitates the dead. (AS p. 98-100, TPAAJ p. 78-80).
3. *Kedushah*: A blessing proclaiming God’s holiness. (AS p. 102, TPAAJ p. 80-81).

and ends with the same 3 blessings thanking God:

1. *Avodah*: A prayer for God to accept our prayers and to restore the *Beth Mikdash*. (AS p. 110, TPAAJ p. 97-99).
2. *Hoda’ah (Modim)*: A prayer of thanksgiving for God’s wonders and sustenance. (AS p. 112-114, TPAAJ p. 99-102).
3. *Shalom*: A prayer for peace. (AS p. 116, TPAAJ P. 102-104).

After the final blessing, it has become custom to say a paragraph that asks God to guide us away from speaking badly, to protect us from our enemies, and to cause us to follow God’s *mitzvot*. This is followed by a prayer for peace which is also the last line of Mourner’s *Kaddish*²⁶ and finally a prayer for the restoration of the *Beth Mikdash*. These prayers can be found in AS p. 118.

²² Also known as *Shemoneh Esreh* (“18”) from the fact that the weekday *Amidah* used to have 18 blessings (now there are 19).

²³ See above “How often do we pray and when?,” p.12.

²⁴ See below p. 20.

²⁵ Psalms 57:17. In *Mincha* and *Musaf* we also say “When I call out to the Lord, ascribe greatness to our God,” Deut 32:3. The reason why we do not say this verse in *Shacharit* and *Ma’ariv* is explained below, “

Interruption Between the *Shema*’s Blessings and the *Amidah*” p. 29

²⁶ See above p.16

Between the first three and last three blessings of the *Amidah*, there are other blessings added based on the particular day. They will be discussed below.

THE MIDDLE BLESSINGS OF THE WEEKDAY AMIDAH

For more on this section, see TPAAJ Chapter 3 and AS p. 98-118.

During weekdays, the middle section of the *Amidah* consists of 13 blessings, which make requests of God. They are numbered below according to their position in the entire *Amidah*. I adopt the subject headings from TPAAJ. One is free (and encouraged) to add their own thoughts to each of these blessings, provided that the thoughts are part of the theme of that blessing. However, in blessing number 16, prayers of all sorts can be added.

The spiritual needs of the individual:

4. *Binah* (Insight) (AS p. 102, TPAAJ p. 81-82): Praises God as giver of wisdom, and asks God to grant us same.
5. *Teshuvah* (Repentance) (AS p. 102, TPAAJ p. 82-83): Asks God to return us to God's Torah and to service of God.
6. *Selichah* (Forgiveness) (AS p. 102, TPAAJ p. 83-84): Asks God to forgive our iniquities.

The physical, emotional, and material needs of the individual:

7. *Geulah* (Redemption) (AS p. 102): Prays for God to redeem us from troubles.
8. *Refuah* (Healing) (AS p. 104, TPAAJ p. 85-86). Prays for God to heal the sick.
9. *Birkat Hashanim* (Blessing the Year) (AS 104, TPAAJ 86-88). Prays for God to bless this year as a year of economic prosperity. Note that prosperity is reflected agriculturally – “Bless . . . this year upon us, and all its crops . . .”

The needs of the Jewish People and Society:

10. *Kibutz* (Ingathering) (AS p. 106, TPAAJ p. 88-90), a prayer for an ingathering of the Jewish people.
11. *Mishpat* (Justice) (AS p. 106, TPAAJ p. 90-91) prays for the restoration of Israelite judges and advisors, and for God to reign in kindness and compassion.²⁷
12. *Minim* (Heretics) (AS p. 106, TPAAJ p. 91-93). This is a prayer for the destruction of Israel's enemies. It was particularly designed as a response to non-rabbinic Israelite groups. There was often an extremely hostile relationship between different sects of Jews in ancient times.²⁸
13. *Tsadikim* (Righeous) (AS p. 106, TPAAJ 93-94) asks God to protect and reward the righteous.
14. *Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem) (AS p. 108, TPAAJ p. 94-95) prays for the restoration of Jerusalem and the Beth Mikdash.

²⁷ The beginning of this blessing, “Restore our judges as of old, our advisors as of yore,” is based on Isaiah 1:25, “And I will restore your judges as of old, your advisers as of yore.

²⁸ According to the Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 28b, this blessing was added after the original 18 blessings. However, there is other evidence that indicates that this blessing was part of the original 18, but that blessings number 14 and 15 started at as one blessing which was eventually split into two..

15. *David* (Davidic Dynasty) (AS p. 108, TPAAJ 95-96). Prays for the restoration of the Davidic dynasty. According to tradition, the Messiah will be from the Davidic line.

16. *Shema Kolenu* (Hear Our Prayers) (AS p. 108-110, TPAAJ p. 96-97). A prayer for God to hear our prayers. Remember this is the elastic blessing – all thoughts and prayers can be added to this blessing. The best place to add these thoughts is where Art Scroll has two circles.

THE MIDDLE BLESSING OF THE SABBATH AND HOLIDAY AMIDAH

For more on this section, see TPAAJ Chapters 4 and AS pages listed below.

During the Sabbath and Holidays, the 13 middle supplications of the *Amidah* are not recited. Instead, there is a single middle blessing, which talks about the Sabbath and/or Holiday that is being observed. This blessing is referred to as *Kedushat Hayom*, “The Sanctification of the Day.”

For the Sabbath, the *Shacharit*, *Mincha*, and *Ma’ariv*²⁹ *Amidahs* there is a different text of this middle blessing for each *Amidah*, though each blessing ends “Blessed are You, God, who sanctifies the Sabbath.” The *Shacharit*, *Mincha*, and *Ma’ariv Amidahs* for holidays³⁰ are basically the same, with little inserts to make reference to the specific day.

The *Musaf Amidah* for both Sabbath and Holidays³¹ laments the loss of the *Beth Mikdash*, and recounts the *Musaf* offering that would be made in the Temple on that day.

You can find the translation and notes on these blessings in TPAAJ chapter 4 and in AS at:

- Sabbath *Ma’ariv*: p. 340
- Sabbath *Shacharit*: p. 424
- Sabbath *Musaf*: p. 466-468
- Sabbath *Mincha*: p. 516-518
- Holiday *Shacharit*, *Mincha*, and *Ma’ariv*: p. 662-666
- Holiday *Musaf*: p. 678-688

On *Rosh Chodesh*, the weekday *Amidah* is said (with an additional paragraph recognizing *Rosh Chodesh* inserted in the first of the last three blessings), but there is also a *Musaf Amidah*. The middle blessing of that *Amidah* can be found at AS p. 646-648.

On *Rosh Hashanah*, the *Musaf Amidah* has 3 middle blessings (TPAAJ p. 121). They are

4. *Malchuyot* (Kingship). (This section includes *Kidush Hayom*)
5. *Zichronot* (Remembrances)

²⁹ Recall that we discussed the names and timing of different services above “How often do we pray and when?,” p.12.

³⁰ Recited even if the holiday happens to also be the Sabbath. There are special inserts that mention the Sabbath.

³¹ As in footnote 30, the Holiday *Musaf* is recited even if the holiday happens to also be the Sabbath. There are special inserts that mention the Sabbath.

6. *Shofarot* (Shofars)

Each blessing contains quotations of at least 10 verses that refer to the given theme.

<i>Amidah Blessings Chart</i>		
Weekday Amidah:	Sabbath & Holidays:	Rosh Hashanah Musaf
1. <i>Avot</i> (Forbearers)	1. <i>Avot</i> (Forbearers)	1. <i>Avot</i> (Forbearers)
2. <i>Gevurot</i> (Powers)	2. <i>Gevurot</i> (Powers)	2. <i>Gevurot</i> (Powers)
3. <i>Kedushah</i> (Holiness)	3. <i>Kedushah</i> (Holiness)	3. <i>Kedushah</i> (Holiness)
4. <i>Binah</i> (Insight)		
5. <i>Teshuvah</i> (Repentance)		
6. <i>Selichah</i> (Forgiveness)		
7. <i>Geulah</i> (Redemption)		
8. <i>Refuah</i> (Healing)	4. <i>Kidush Hayim</i> (Sanctification of the Day)	
9. <i>Birkat Hashanim</i> (Blessing the Year)		
10. <i>Kibutz</i> (Ingathering)		
11. <i>Mishpat</i> (Justice)		
12. <i>Minim</i> (Heretics)		
13. <i>Tsadikim</i> (Righeous)		
14. <i>Yerushalayim</i> (Jerusalem)		
15. <i>David</i> (Davidic Dynasty)		
16. <i>Shema Kolenu</i> (Hear Our Prayers)		
17. <i>Avodah</i> (Worship)	5. <i>Avodah</i> (Worship)	7. <i>Avodah</i> (Worship)
18. <i>Modim</i> (Thanksgiving)	6. <i>Modim</i> (Thanksgiving)	8. <i>Modim</i> (Thanksgiving)
19. <i>Shalom</i> (Peace).	7. <i>Shalom</i> (Peace).	9. <i>Shalom</i> (Peace).

ADDITIONS TO THE AMIDAH FOR SPECIFIC DAYS

There are many prayers that are added to the *Amidah* during specific time periods. Those additions are discussed at TPAAJ p. 130-143. They are generally in shaded portions in AS, see p. 98-118.

THE REPETITION OF THE AMIDAH

In *Shacharit*, *Mincha*, and *Musaf* (and *Neilah*), the *Amidah* is recited silently by everyone, and then, if there is a minyan, repeated aloud by the *Chazan*.³² Originally, before the existence of the printing press, there were many people who were not able to recite the *Amidah* on their own. Instead, they could listen to the *Chazan*, and say Amen after each blessing, and it would count as

³² This repetition is often referred to as *Chazarat HaSha”ts* – the repetition by the representative of the congregation. Sha”Tz is an acronym for Shaliach Tzibur, which means “representative of the congregation.”

if they had recited the *Amidah* on their own. Nowadays, the repetition of the *Amidah* serves two functions. First, it give a sense of *tefillah b'tsibur* – prayer by and for the public. Second, the *Keushah*, which is added to the third blessing of the repetition, is a *davar shebikdusha*, which can only be said with a Minyan.³³

The Power of Amen

Amen is a word that indicates that the listener agrees to whatever prayer or blessing the other person has said. In Jewish law, if one hears someone say a blessing, and says amen after hearing the prayer or blessing, it is as if that person has said it him or herself. So, for example, if Jane says *hamotsee* (the blessing for eating bread), and David listens and says amen, it is as if David said *hamotsee*, and he can eat bread as well as Jane. This is true providing that the person who says the blessing was of equal obligation to say the blessing. So, for instance, if a child who is not obligated to say the *Amidah* says the *Amidah*, and David listens and says amen, David has not fulfilled his obligation of prayer.³⁴

Additions to the Repetition of the *Amidah* (*Kedushah*, *Rabbi's Modim*, Priestly Blessing)

During the repetition, several features are added.

In the third blessing, “*Kedushah*” (AS p. 100 below the line, though different versions are said on Holiday mornings, TPAAJ p. 122-130) is recited. This is a special declaration of God’s praise, which can only be recited with a Minyan. The theme of the prayer is how the angels declare God’s holiness. Its three key verses (Isaiah 6:3, Ezekiel 3:12, Psalms 146:10) are recited aloud by the congregation. The rest is recited by the *Chazan* (though in most synagogues the congregation reads some of these parts silently before the *Chazzan* says them aloud).

During the *Kedushah*, one is not permitted to talk or to walk around. Even if one just walked into the synagogue, one should stand at attention as *Kedushah* is recited. During the recitation, it is customary to raise ourselves up onto the tips of our toes three times as we say the words קָדוֹשׁ, קָדוֹשׁ, קָדוֹשׁ *Holy, holy, holy*, and then once at the beginning of the other two congregational responses. This is meant to emulate the angels, as this is said to be the way that they bow.

As the *Chazzan* begins to recite the second to last blessing, the congregation recites a variation on that theme, called “*Modim Derabanan*” (The Rabbi’s Modim), see AS p. 113 (shaded portion in the inside column), TPAAJ 101-102).

In the prayer for peace, the Priestly blessing found in Numbers 6:24-26 is recited (AS p. 116, 694-700, TPAAJ p. 132-137). This was added because there was a desire to use this blessing after the Beth Mikdash was destroyed. Since the final word of the Priestly blessing is “Peace,” It

³³ See above “What is a Minyan?” above p. 14.

³⁴ Also note that after saying a blessing, one is not permitted to speak before doing the *mitzvah*, or eating some of the food referred to in the blessing. This is also true of the one saying “amen,” – they should not speak until doing the *mitzvah* or eating the food.

was thought appropriate to add this priestly blessing at this point. In general, the Chazzan recites the Priestly blessing. On particular occasions, the *Cohanim*, the descendants of the Priests, come up to the *Bimah* and recite the blessing.³⁵ This practice is known as *duchaning*, after the podium (*duchan*) that the Priests stood on in the Temple when delivering the blessing.

RULES AND PRACTICES OF RECITING THE AMIDAH

- While one recites the *Amidah*, one should stand at attention and not speak to anyone, except in cases of grave danger. This includes not even saying Amen if you hear someone saying a blessing, and not responding to the Kedushah³⁶ or Kaddish if that is being said while we are reciting the *Amidah*.
- The words to the *Amidah* should be recited aloud, but not loud enough for anyone else to hear.
- Before saying the *Amidah*, one should take three steps forward, symbolic of approaching God with our prayers. Often, people take three steps backwards before taking the three steps forward. This is simply to afford enough room to take the steps forward.
- during the *Amidah*, and not walk or talk at all during the *Amidah*, except in cases of danger.
- Hands should be ritually washed before reciting the *Amidah*. Usually this can be done as you enter the synagogue before beginning to pray.
- There are four, **and only four**, times that a person should bend one's knees and then bow during the *Amidah*. Originally, people would kneel and prostrate at these times. Each of these times is indicated by Art Scroll³⁷. They are:
 - o The first two times that we say בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה (*Blessed are You*) in the *Amidah*. We bend our knees for בָּרוּךְ (*Blessed*) and bow for אַתָּה (*are You*), and stand straight before we say God's name (the next word).
 - o At the beginning of the second to last blessing (*Modim*, Thanksgiving). We bow until we say God's name (Standing up before saying the name).³⁸
 - o At the end of the *Modim* section, again bending our knees for בָּרוּךְ (*Blessed*) and bowing for אַתָּה (*are You*), and standing straight before we say God's name (the next word).

³⁵ In our synagogue, we have the *Cohanim* do the blessing in *Musaf* of holidays. In other circles, it is done every Sabbath, or even every day.

³⁶ If Kedusha is being recited while one is still saying the *Amidah*, one should stop the *Amidah*, and silently listen to the Kedusha without responding aloud.

³⁷ In one of these four, AS indicates to only bow, without bending the knees. I disagree and feel that knees should be bent as well.

³⁸ Many people do not bend their knees at this point, probably because it lacks the two-word coordination of “בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה”. Others (myself included) do bend our knees before bowing.



ברוך
(bend the knees)



אפקה/ מזדים אנהנו לך שאפהה הויא
(bow, stand up before saying God's name)

- At the end of the Amidah, it is customary to take three steps backwards before saying **עוֹשֶׂה שְׁלָום בָּמָרוּמִיו** (*Who makes peace in His heights*), bow to the left while reciting **עוֹשֶׂה שְׁלָום בָּמָרוּמִיו**, bow to the right as one says **וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל עַלְנוּ** (*may he make peace upon us*), and to the center as one says **וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל כָּל אֶתְיָהוּ** (*and upon all Israel*).³⁹
- There are those who tend to shake ("shukel") during prayer. Some see this as a symbol of fervor, or trepidation at praying before God. Others see it as a release of nervous energy. There are those, this author included, who prefer not to shukel, as we are supposed to approach God with all the respect with which we would approach an earthly king (and more). For more on this topic, see TPAAJ p. 41-42.
- During the prayer for forgiveness, many have the custom of beating the left side of their chest while saying the words **חִטְאָנוּ** (*we have erred*) and **פְּשֻׁעָנוּ** (*we have sinned*).

³⁹ Note that customs vary as to this stage direction for this part. For a pictorial reference, see the section on Mourner's Kaddish, above p. 16.

THE SHEMA

For further reading on this section, including a translation of Shema, see TPAAJ chapter 6 and AS p. 90-94.

Though the Shema is a major part of the Morning and Evening prayer service, it is technically its own entity. Above, Maimonides described the obligation of prayer ("What is Prayer?" p. 9 above). Besides this obligation, there is also an obligation to recite "The Shema" twice a day.⁴⁰ Unlike the obligation to recite the *Amidah*, which is considered rabbinic, reciting Shema is considered a biblical commandment.⁴¹ This is because the first paragraph (Deut. 6:7) says, "you shall speak these words . . . when you lie down and when you rise up."⁴² Similarly the second paragraph (Deutl 11:19) says you should recite these words "when you lie down and when you rise up." The third paragraph is recited because we are commanded to remember that God took us out of Egypt every night and every morning. In Jewish law, only adult males are required to recite Shema (Mishnah Berachot 3:3).

"The Shema" consists of three paragraphs from the Bible:

- The First Paragraph: Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is a declaration that God is our only God, and instruction to love God, that God's teachings should always be on our minds, and that we should teach these words to our children. This paragraph is also one of the sources of the obligation to wear *tefillin* and have *mezuzas* on our doors. We will discuss *tefillin* and *mezuzas* later.
 - The words בָּרוּךְ שֵׁם קָבُוד מָלְכֹותָ לְעוֹלָם וְעַד (May the name of his glorious kingdom be blessed forever and ever) are interpolated⁴³ after the first verse of Shema. These words are recited in an undertone, except on Yom Kippur. Legend has it that as Jacob (also known as Israel) was on his death bed, he instructed his children regarding monotheism, and questioned their loyalty to that ideal. His children said to him the words that would become the first verse of *Shema* "Hear, Israel, A-donay is our

⁴⁰ The morning *Shema* should be recited during the first three hours of the day as described in "The Real Jewish Standard Time" p. 12 and in the evening any time after the stars come out (~45 minutes after sundown) through the next sunrise, but best before midnight JST.

⁴¹ In Judaism, we have two forms of commandment. One are commandments that are in the Torah, or are derived directly from the Five Books of Moses. These are often referred to as אורהיתא (de'orayta, from the Torah), or in English "Torah commandments." The other form of commandment is rabbinic commandment, often referred to as דרבנן (derabanan, from the Rabbis), or "Rabbinic law." These laws are still obligatory, but are generally of lesser stature. This means, for instance, that sometimes they can be waived in cases of extreme distress, and also that they will often be waived if it happens that fulfilling that law gets in the way of fulfilling a Torah law.

⁴² Taken by the rabbis to mean "at the time that people go to sleep, and when people wake up" – i.e. night and morning.

⁴³ I.e. these words do not appear in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and are added in as we recite the Shema.

God, A-donay alone.” At that point, Jacob answered “*May the name of his glorious kingdom be blessed forever and ever.*”

- The Second Paragraph: Deuteronomy 11:13-21 describes a sense of reward and punishment. If Israel follows the law, they will get rain at the right times, and their crops will succeed. If Israel fails to follow the law, their crops will fail⁴⁴. Again, we are bid to keep God’s word on our minds, and to teach our children. This is also a source for to wear *tefillin* and have *mezuzas* on our doors.
- The Third Paragraph: Numbers 15:37-41 commands the people to wear fringes on their garments (this is a source for the *talit*, which we will discuss below). This is to be done so as to remember to follow God’s commandments. The paragraph concludes with a mention that it is God who took the Jewish people out of Egypt, which fulfills an obligation to mention the departure from Egypt twice a day.

BLESSINGS WHICH ACCOMPANY THE SHEMA

For further reading on this section, including a partial translation, see TPAAJ p. 156-165 and AS pages indicated below.

The reciting of Shema is surrounded by several blessings. These are referred to as ברכות קריית שמה (the Blessings of the Reading of Shema). In the morning, there are two blessings before, and one blessing after the *Shema*. In the evening there are two blessings before, and two blessings after the *Shema*. The themes of each blessing are the same in morning and evening, although the exact text changes. The themes of these blessings are as follows:

Before *Shema*:

1. God as creator of light and darkness (Morning: AS p. 84-88, Evenings: AS p. 256-258; TPAAJ p. 157-160,).
2. God’s love for the people Israel, as demonstrated by God’s guidance and giving of Torah (Mornings: AS p. 88-90, Evenings: AS p. 258; TPAAJ p. 160-161).⁴⁵

After the *Shema*:

1. God as redeemer of Israel, particularly with reference to God redeeming Israel from Egyptian slavery (Mornings: AS p. 94-96, Eveings: AS p. 260-262).
2. (Evenings Only) Asks God’s protection throughout the night (AS p. 262-264 (p. 334-336 on Friday nights), TPAAJ 163-164). Remember that in ancient times the evenings were far more dangerous than in modern society.

In the morning, the first blessing before the *Shema* has a form of *Kedusha* added to it (AS p. 86-88, TPAAJ p. 159-160). According to some (myself included), this section should only be said with a *minyan* present. Others argue that this isn’t the “real” *Kedusha*, and therefore it may be said by individuals without a *minyan*. Scholars are divided as to whether *Kedushah* was originally in the blessings of the *Shema* and then transferred to the *Amidah*, or vice versa. For

⁴⁴ The idea of reward and punishment is a theologically difficult and complex idea. It is one with which there were clearly struggles even in our Bible. See, for example, the Book of Job.

⁴⁵ Note the symmetry between this blessing, expressing how God loved the people Israel, with the first paragraph of the *Shema*, which instructs us to love God.

more on *Kedushah*, see “Additions to the Repetition of the Amidah (*Kedushah*, Rabbi’s Modim, Priestly Blessing)” p. 23.

On weekday evenings, some rituals include a third blessing after the *Shema* (AS p. 264-266, TPAAJ p. 164). This prayer was added at a time shortly after the close of the Babylonian Talmud. It is a series of 18 verses originally intended as a replacement to the *Amidah* in the evening, though sources are not clear on why.⁴⁶ There are those (myself included) who do not recite this prayer, on the grounds that it was not originally part of the blessings, and that it further creates a separation between the original blessings of the *Shema* and the reciting of the *Amidah* (see next section). For a complete discussion on this prayer, see Elbogen p. 87-90.

RULES AND CUSTOMS REGARDING THE RECITING OF SHEMA AND HER BLESSINGS

- Before reciting the *Shema*, one should ritually wash one’s hands. Usually this can be done as you enter the synagogue before beginning to pray.
- The eyes should be covered while reciting the first verse of *Shema* in order to increase concentration.
- Where *Shema* is recited by an individual, some add the words “אֱלֹהִים מֶלֶךְ נָמֵן” (“God is a faithful king”). This is done so that the number of words in *Shema* equal the number of bones in the body (where the *Shema* is done in public, the final three words of *shema* are repeated by the leader, which gets the number to the desired total. Others object to this custom of adding “אֱלֹהִים” as it is not mentioned in the Talmud, and may constitute an interruption in the prayers).
- One should extend the pronunciation of the word **בָּרוּךְ** in the first line of *Shema*, as long as it takes to think about God’s dominion over the heaven, earth, and the four directions. The final letter, **ר**, should be extended. This is impossible when the letter is pronounced as a hard “d” sound. Historically, this letter was pronounced as a D/Th sound (as in the English word “that”) where there is no dot in the letter, and as a D when there is a dot.
- The words of *Shema* should be pronounced aloud (but not as loud as to disturb others), and read as clearly as possible.
- *Shema* may be done in any language. If done in another language, the words should still be read clearly, and a good translation is desirable.
- During the *Shema*, a limited number of interruptions are permitted. Otherwise, there should be no conversation. These interruptions include:
 - Between the first and second blessing before the *Shema*, between the second blessing and the *Shema*, between the first and second paragraph of *Shema*, and between the second and third paragraph of *Shema*, one should greet someone to whom they owe respect (parent, Rabbi/teacher, or

⁴⁶ Some believe it was designed as a stall tactic, so that late comers could catch up with everyone else, and therefore not be left to walk home from synagogue alone. At that time synagogues were generally placed outside the city. Others say it was introduced at a time of persecution where Jews could not say the *Amidah*. Others believe it was a time saver.

someone of greater Torah knowledge). If the person is greeted by anyone (regardless of stature, the person should respond in kind.

- While in the middle of a paragraph or blessing, or between the end of *Shhema* and the subsequent paragraph, one may only greet someone out of a sense of fear (e.g. if a King walks in, and failure to greet the King might be a capital offense – something that doesn't come up nowadays). However, if greeted by someone to whom one owes respect, one may respond in kind.
- After the blessing after the *Shema* (Redeemer of Israel), no interruption is permitted (see below).
- There are many differing opinions as to whether saying Amen during the reciting of *Shema* and its blessings is permitted.
- Some have the custom of gathering the *tsitsit* (fringes) from their *talit* before *Shema*, and kissing them each time *tsitsit* are mentioned in the final paragraph. Other rabbis have vehemently objected to this practice as being distractive.

Interruption Between the Shema's Blessings and the Amidah

ברוך אתה ה' גָּאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל (Blessed are you God, redeemer of Israel), one should not make any interruption before beginning the *Amidah*. This is called *semichat ge'ulah letefillah* – making the redemption blessing close to our prayer.⁴⁷ It is for this reason that, especially in the morning *Amidah*, the end of this blessing is recited quietly, so that no one accidentally respond *Amen* to this blessing.⁴⁸

SHACHARIT: THE MORNING SERVICE

Now that we have been introduced to some of the main components to Jewish prayer, we are ready to see how they work into the prayer services, as well as what other parts there are to the services. We will start with the morning service, which is by far the lengthiest, and has many different parts. The basic outline of the morning service is the same every morning. There are some added flourishes on the Sabbath and holidays, which will be discussed below as well.

PRAYERS GENERALLY RECITED BEFORE SYNAGOGUE SERVICES.

Modeh Ani and Elohay Neshamah: Thanking God for Waking Up

There are many prayers that people say before entering the morning service. Some of the highlights follow. A more complete discussion can be found at TPAAJ p. 185-190.

Upon waking up, many people have the custom of reciting the following (AS p. 2):

⁴⁷ As a historical note, it seems that originally the term *semichat ge'ulah letefillah* meant that one should finish reciting *Shema* in the morning just as the sun came over the horizon, and thus begin the *Amidah* exactly as the sun began to rise.

⁴⁸ Other Rabbis believe that one should answer *Amen* to this blessing, and that doing so is not considered an interruption.

מָזְךָ אֱנִי לְפָנֶיךָ
living and eternal King
שַׁחֲזֹרֶת בֵּין נְשָׁמָתִי בְּחַמְלָה
who compassionately restored my soul
רְבָה אַמְנוֹנָתֶךָ
your faithfulness is abundant.

This seems to me a truncation of the prayer *Elohay Neshamah* that the Babylonian Talmud⁴⁹ says should be recited upon waking up. That prayer can be found at the top of AS p. 18 and TPAAJ p. 187-188. For technical reasons, some people feel that this prayer should not be said upon waking. I side with the plain meaning of the Babylonian Talmud.

The Blessing on the Study of Torah

This blessing, called *Birkat ha'Torah* can be found at AS p. 16, and TPAAJ p. 188-190. It thanks God for commanding us to study the Torah. After saying any blessing regarding a *mitzvah*, we should immediately fulfill that *mitzvah*, before doing anything else. For this reason, the printed siddur provides a couple of sections of both written and oral Torah to be recited after saying this blessing.⁵⁰

Blessings on Putting On the Talit and Tefillin.

Before morning services begin, we put on Talit and, during weekdays, Tefillin. We will discuss these *mitzvot* and their blessings more fully at a later time. The blessings and procedure can be found at AS p. 4-8 and TPAAJ p. 29-37.

Thanking God For Our Bodily Functions

Unseemly though it may seem, without our excretory system, we could not survive. There is a blessing to thank God for our ability to relieve ourselves, which is to be said each time we do so. This prayer can be found at AS p. 14 and TPAAJ p. 186. We will discuss it further in a future class.

Washing of the Hands

We also wash our hands in the morning. This is done as a matter of ritual cleanliness, not of physical cleanliness. In fact, one must completely wash ones hands before doing the ritual hand washing. The blessing for hand-washing is found on AS p. 14 and TPAAJ p. 185. We will discuss this ritual further in a future class. There are those who believe that this washing of the hands should be done before reciting any blessing in the morning. Others view hand washing as being necessary only before eating certain foods, and before reciting *Shema* and the *Amidah*. I

⁴⁹ *Berachot* 60b.

⁵⁰ As an aside, the second blessing before the reading of *Shema* (see above “Blessings Which Accompany the *Shema*” p. 27) also thanks God for giving Torah. Therefore, if one forgot to say *Birkat Ha'Torah*, and has already said the blessings of *Shema*, one need not say *Birkat Ha'Torah* later in the day.

agree with the latter group, and therefore I wash my hands right before services, rather than at home when I wake up as many others do.

Mah Tovu

Many people recite the words of *Mah Tovu* upon entering a synagogue. These are a series of verses praising Jewish life and service of God. (AS p. 12, TBAAJ p. 200)

BIRCHOT HASHACHAR – MORNING BLESSINGS

ברכות השחר, *Morning Blessings* (AS p. 18-20, TPAAJ p. 191-196) are prayers which thank God for certain things that happen to us each morning, as prescribed in the Babylonian Talmud Berachot 60b. Today, most people say all of these blessings together at one time (often when they get to synagogue), and the *Chazzan* begins public services by reciting these blessings aloud. Each blessing starts “*Blessed are you Adonay, our God, sovereign of the universe*” and continues as follows. I present these blessings in the order they appear in the siddur, but note the situations in which the Talmud says to recite these blessing.

1. **When hearing the rooster crow**⁵¹: *who has given to the rooster understanding to distinguish between day and night.*
2. **When opening one's eyes:** *who gives sight to the blind.*
3. **When dressing:** *who clothes the naked.*
4. **When stretching and sitting up:** *who loosens the bound.*
5. **When standing up:** *who straightens the bent.*
6. **When putting feet on the floor:** *who spreads the earth over water.*
7. **When putting on shoes:** *who has supplied all my needs.*
8. **When starting to walk:** *who firms up a person's step.*
9. **When tightening a belt:** *who girds Israel with strength.*
10. **When covering the head:** *who crowns Israel with glory.*
11. **When washing the face:** *Blessed are you, Adonay our God, sovereign of the Universe, who removed the bands of sleep from my eyes and slumber from my eyelids.*⁵² *And may it be your will Adonay, our God and God of our fathers, to habituate us to your Torah, and make us cleave to your mitvot, and bring us not to sin, and not to iniquity and transgression, nor to challenge, nor to denigration, and let not our evil inclination rule over us. And distance us from an evil person and an evil friend. And make us cleave to our good inclination and to good deeds, and bend our inclination to be subjugated to you. And grant us today and every day, grace, kindness, and mercy in your eyes, and in the eyes of all who see us, and bestow good kindness upon us. Blessed are you Adonay, who bestows good kindness on his people Israel.*⁵³

⁵¹ Many, myself included, do not say this blessing unless we actually hear a rooster crow. The same stands for the other blessings and their related acts.

⁵² Note: Many siddurs give the mistaken impression that this blessing ends here. It does not. It continues until the end of the paragraph as presented in Art Scroll.

⁵³ Note that the words “on his people Israel” are not part of the original text of the blessing (see e.g. *Dikdukei Soferim* on Berachot 60b note ¶).

To these blessings, prescribes in Berachot 60b, several other blessings have been added. Three of them, which are highly controversial, are blessings which Rabbi Meir says that one should say every day.⁵⁴ They are generally said after the first blessing in the list above. They are:

1. *Who has not made me a non-Jew.*
2. *Who has not made me a slave.*
3. *Who has not made me a woman.*

It is no surprise that many people are offended by these blessings. In fact, many rabbis, amongst them very Orthodox ones, have said that these blessings were never meant to be, and should never have been incorporated into the synagogue service, and should be removed. The apologists explain that these blessings thank God for the increasing level of *mitzvot* that a person has to fulfill.⁵⁵ I am not sure how many people are put at ease by this explanation.

To these blessings, an alternative blessing has been suggested for women to recite in lieu of the third blessing. “*Who made me according to his will.*” Others object to this blessing as contrived, and feel that it should not be said.

Before blessing # 11 in the list, another blessing Ashkenazim add is a blessing, “*who gives strength to the weak.*” As this blessing was clearly a later addition, may people object to saying this blessing.

What is a Beracha Levatalah (Vain Blessing)?

Why would people object to saying a blessing? Why not make a blessing such as “*who has given to the rooster understanding to distinguish between day and night*” even if one has not heard a rooster? Why not create new blessings such as, “*Who made me according to his will*” or “*who gives strength to the weak*”?

The answer lies in the concept of a *beracha levatalah*, a vain blessing. The Rabbis objected to saying blessings when not in the proper context and formulation. They felt that this was a form of taking God’s name in vain. For instance, if one said *hamotsee* without eating bread, it would be a vain blessing. Similarly, if the Talmud says to say a blessing when hearing the rooster, this may be the only appropriate time to say a blessing. Further, making up a new blessing, without the imprimatur of the Rabbis may be a problem as well.

MORNING PRAYERS THAT ARE OFTEN SKIPPED

Certain parts of the morning service are often skipped. In our synagogue we skip some of these parts as well. Originally, they were not said as part of the synagogue service, but in private prayer.

⁵⁴ Babylonian Talmud Menachot 43b. Other sources attribute these blessings to Rabbi Judah the Prince.

⁵⁵ I.e. a non-Jew is not subject to Torah commandments. A slave is exempted from all time-bound *mitzvot*, and a woman exempt from most time-bound *mitzvot*. See above footnote 5 p. 10.

Akeida (*The binding of Isaac*)

עֲקִדָּה, The binding of Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19) Tells the story of God telling Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham's willingness to do so, and God's stopping Abraham in the end. Many recite this section of the Bible every morning, together with a prayer that God remember Abraham's actions when deciding how to treat us. AS p. 22-24, TPAAJ p. 198.

Early Shema

Early שְׁמַע Shema There are certain time restrictions to how early one must say *Shema* in the morning.⁵⁶ If one is running late, the complete *Shema* is said here. Otherwise, just the first line of *Shema* is said here. AS p. 28,

Korbanot (Sacrifices)

קורבןות Korbanot Sacrifices (AS p. 30-top of p. 48). Discusses the laws of sacrifices. This is done in the hopes that our discussion of those laws may be viewed by G-d as if we had in fact given those sacrifices. Many congregations skip this section.

BRAYTA D'RABI YISHMAEL - TEACHING OF RABBI YISHMAEL

ברייתא דרבי יישמעאל, *the teaching of Rabbi Yishmael* (AS p. 48-52, TPAAJ p. 199-200). This section is presented as an additional opportunity to study of text. It discusses Rabbi Yishmael's list of thirteen methods used to expound the *Torah*. It is followed by a prayer for the restoration of the Temple. This teaching gives us an opportunity to recite Kaddish Derabanan.⁵⁷

PSALM 30

At this point in the service Psalm 30 (AS p. 54-66, TPAAJ p. 176-188) is recited, followed by Mourner's Kaddish.⁵⁸

PESUKEI D'ZIMRAH - VERSES OF SONG

For more on this section, see TPAAJ Chapters 7 and AS p. 58-82 plus pages 372-388 and 400-404 for those Psalms that are added on the Sabbath and holidays.

פָסָוקִי דִזְמָרָה, *Verses of song* is a part of the service serves as a "warm up." It consists of praises of God, mostly of psalms, but also contains other Biblical scripture and some other material.

The beginning of *Pesukei D'Zimrah* is בָּרוּךְ שֶׁאָמַר Baruch She'amar - "Blessed is he who spoke and the world began." (AS p. 58, TPAAJ p. 168-172).

⁵⁶ See footnote 40 p. 26f.

⁵⁷ See above, "The Rabbi's Kaddish" p. 18.

⁵⁸ Recall that Mourner's Kaddish is generally recited after saying a chapter of scripture. See "The Mourner's Kaddish" p. 16.

The main section of *Pesukei D'zimrah* is אָשְׁרֵי *Ashrei*⁵⁹, (AS p. 66-68, TPAAJ p. 171-172) followed by psalms 145-150. The Babylonian Talmud lauds people who say this set of Psalms every day.

Shortly after the *Ashrei* is שִׁירַת הַיָּם (*Shirat haYam*) the song of the sea (AS p. 78-80, TPAAJ p. 173-174) which was sung by Israel after they crossed the Red Sea.

The close of *Pesukei D'Zimrah* is יִשְׁתַּבָּח ("Praised") (AS p. 82, TPAAJ p. 171).

Although most of *Pesukei D'zimrah* is the same on Sabbaths and on weekdays, AS p. 372-388 and 400-404 are added for the Sabbath and holidays. See also TJAAJ p. 178-182.

THE SHEMA AND HER BLESSINGS

At this point, with the above warm-up done, we are ready to get to the main parts of the service. We begin with the *Shema* and her blessings, which we already discussed above, starting on p. 26. These blessing are introduced by **Barechu, the Call to Worship**. Barechu, in turn, is introduced by the Half Kaddish.⁶⁰ The *barechu* is done as follows:

בָּרוּךְ אֱתָה הָאָמֵן בָּרוּךְ

Congregation (bowing): *Blessed is God, the blessed one, forever.*

בָּרוּךְ הָאָמֵן בָּרוּךְ לְעוֹלָם וְעַד.

Cantor (bowing): *Blessed is God, the blessed one, forever.*

For more on *Barechu*, see AS p. 84, TPAAJ p. 165-166.

THE AMIDAH IS RECITED

For more about the Amidah, see p. 19 and following.

After the Amidah is recited silently, it is repeated by the *Chazan*. Remember that which *Amidah* is recited is determined by the day. It may be the weekday *Amidah*, the Sabbath morning *Amidah*, the Holiday *Amidah*, etc.

ON MOST WEEKDAYS, TACHANUN IS RECITED.

For more on this section, see AS p. 124-136 and TPAAJ p. 202-210

Tachanun, which means “supplication.” Is a series of extra prayers that are said after the *Shacharit* and *Mincha* *Amidah* on weekdays, except if the day is otherwise somehow important.⁶¹ A longer form of *Tachanun* is recited on Monday and Thursday mornings.

⁵⁹ Ashrei: Combination of Psalm 84:5, Psalm 144:15, Psalm 145, and Psalm 115:18. Used at many points in prayer. It is recited twice each morning, and once in the afternoon service.

⁶⁰ See above, p. 15.

⁶¹ Though customs vary, a general list of days where *Tachanun* is not said can be found in the box on the bottom left hand corner of AS p. 125.

During *Tachanun*, there is one point (AS p. 132) where it is customary to rest our head on our forearm.⁶²

HALLEL IS RECITED ON HOLIDAYS AND ROSH CHODESH
For more on Hallel see TPAAJ p. 264-270 and AS p. 632-642.

Hallel is Psalms 113-118, with a blessing before and after it. Much of Hallel is often done in song. On Rosh Chodesh and the last 6 days of Passover, where the reciting of Hallel is considered a custom, but not an obligation, two parts of the text are omitted so as to indicate that Hallel is being recited only out of a sense of custom. Many, particularly in Sephardic traditions, do not say the blessings before and after Hallel on these days (I don't either). During Sukkot, the Lulav and Etrog⁶³ are used before and during the Hallel (See AS p. 630).

THE TORAH IS READ ON MONDAYS, THURSDAYS, HOLIDAYS, AND ROSH CHODESH.
For more information on the Torah service, see TPAAJ Chapter 12.

Judaism has always valued public education. One way this has been accomplished is by regularly reading parts of the Bible in public.

Certain hymns and psalms are recited as the Torah (sometimes more than one) is removed from the ark. As usual, there are more hymns and psalms recited on the Sabbath and holidays than on weekdays.⁶⁴ The Torah is carried around the synagogue (in weekday services this is usually not done), and everyone kisses the Torah, usually by touching the Torah with some item (e.g. a Talit or a Siddur) and then kissing that item.

The Torah is then put on a table, and a number of people (in traditional circles Men, though this is slowly changing even in some Orthodox circles) are called for “aliyahs” (described in the next subsection). For each aliyah, a section of the Torah is read. The number of aliyahs varies based on the day.⁶⁵ Traditionally, the first *aliyah* goes to a Cohen, the second to a Levi.⁶⁶ The balance goes to anyone who is not a Cohen or a Levi.

⁶² See picture in TPAAJ p. 204.

⁶³ Sukkot: Harvest festival in the autumn. The word Sukkah means “booth” and refers to the temporary huts in which we are supposed to live on Sukkot. This is meant to remind us of God’s protection as the Israelites traveled through the Sinai wilderness on their way from Egypt to Israel, and also that the Israelites lived in such huts on that trek. During the holiday, we also use a Lulav and Etrog. A bouquet of palm, myrtle, and willow branches, along with the citron fruit.

⁶⁴ Compare the weekday service at AS p. 138-140 to Saturday/holidays AS p. 432-436.

⁶⁵ On Monday/Thursday, there are 3, Rosh Chodesh has 4, Holidays have 5, Yom Kippur 6, and Shabbat 7. This count does not include the “Maftir” *aliyah*, which is an entirely separate *aliyah* that goes to whoever reads the *Haftorah*.

⁶⁶ Levi: A descendant of the tribe of Levi. Some of the Levites were separated out into the Cohanim, the priestly class. The rest of the Levites served as helpers in the Beth Hamikdash.

On non-holiday Saturdays throughout the year, a section of the Torah (called a “*Parsha*”) is read. Each Saturday picks up where the last Saturday left off. On Mondays and Thursdays, we read three short pieces which are the beginning of the next *Parsha*. Through these readings, the entire Five Books of Moses are read throughout the year. On holidays and Rosh Chodesh, special sections of the Torah which relate to that particular holiday is read.

After the Torah has been read, there is a ritual of lifting and tying the Torah, called *Hagbah* (lifting) and *Gelilah* (tying). As the Torah is lifted, the congregation recites

ז' אֵת הַתּُוֹךְ אֲשֶׁר שָׁמָּה מִשְׁנָה לִפְנֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֶל פִּי הַבָּיִד מִשְׁנָה
*This is the Torah which Moses placed before the Children of Israel, by the command of God,
through the hands of Moses.*

This ritual is further described at TPAAJ p. 54-57.

On Sabbath and holidays, after the Torah reading, a *Haftorah* is recited. The *Haftorah* is a selection from the prophets. Each *Haftorah* is either related to that week’s Torah reading, to the given holiday, or to something of significance on the calendar.

After the Torah (and where appropriate, the *Haftorah*) is read, the Torah is returned to the ark. Again, there are more prayers associated with this on Saturday and holidays than on weekdays.⁶⁷ On Saturdays and holidays, many synagogues recite prayers for the government of their land. This is a very ancient practice.

The Procedure for an Aliyah

For details on this section, see TPAAJ p. 49-54

When a person has an *aliyah* to the Torah, either the Torah reader or someone else around the Torah first calls the person up by his Hebrew name, and his father’s Hebrew name (in some liberal circles, both the father and mother’s name is used). The Torah reader points to the place that the Torah reading will start. The person getting the *aliyah* then touches that spot with his tallis⁶⁸, and then kisses his tallis. He then holds on to the Torah’s two handles (preferably leaving the Torah open so the reader doesn’t lose his place), and recites *barechu* in the same way described above on p. 34, followed by the blessing found towards the middle of AS p. 143 and TPAAJ p. 52. The Torah reader then reads a section from the Torah. When finished, the Torah reader points to the spot that he stopped reading, and the person getting the *aliyah* touches that spot with his tallis, and then kisses his tallis. Then the person getting the *aliyah* says the closing blessing, found towards the bottom of AS p. 143 and TPAAJ p. 52.

⁶⁷ Compare AS p. 148 on weekdays with AS p. 448-460 for Shabbat and holidays. Note that on the Sabbath and Holidays, Ashrei is recited, AS p. 456-458. Recall that we say Ashrei twice every morning (see footnote 59p. 34). During the weekdays, Asrhei is part of the concluding prayers (see below “The Conclusion of Weekday Morning Services” p. 37).

⁶⁸ **Tallit:** Garment of four corners with fringes called *tsitsit*. The Bible requires that any garment with four corners to have *tsitsit*. Since most of modern clothing does not have four corners, the practice began to wear a special garment during prayers which would be obligated to have *tsitsit*.

What is a *Mi Sheberach*?

Mi Sheberach literally means “he who blessed.” The text begins by saying “May he who blessed our forbearers . . . bless . . .” and then goes on to describe whom we would like God to bless. In many synagogues (our own included), a *Mi Sheberach* is recited for each person with an *aliyah*, asking God to bless them and their family. We also say a special *Mi Sheberach* for those who are ill. Generally, we recite the name of the sick person and their mother. If we don’t know the name of the mother, we will often use the name *Sarah Immenu* – Sarah our matriarch. You can find the text to this *Mi Sheberach* at AS p. 442. *Mi Sheberachs* are also discussed at TPAAJ p. 252-254.

THE CONCLUSION OF WEEKDAY MORNING SERVICES

For more on this section, see AS p. 150-172 and TPAAJ p. 210-215.

After *Tachanun*, or the Torah reading, the weekday service is ready to wrap up. We recite *Ashrei*⁶⁹ and then (usually) Psalm 20. Next we recite *Kedushah Desidrah*.⁷⁰ On Rosh Chodesh, the *Musaf amidah* is recited here.⁷¹ We recite Full Kaddish⁷² and then *Alenu* (see next subsection). After *Alenu*, Mourner’s Kaddish⁷³ is recited. There are varied psalms recited, depending on the day of the week. These Psalms used to be recited by the Levites in the Beth Mikdash. A special Psalm was recited on Rosh Chodesh, regardless of what day of the week (AS p. 172). After the Psalm of the day, Mourner’s Kaddish is again recited.

⁶⁹ See footnote 59, p. 34.

⁷⁰ Kedushah Desidrah: “The *Kedushah* of Study.” This prayer has as its mainstay the three verses that are at the center of the *Kedushah* (see above “Additions” p. 23) along with Aramaic translations of these lines (Aramaic for some time was the vernacular in the Middle East). Opinions vary as to whether this part should be said without a minyan..

⁷¹ The structure of the Rosh Chodesh service treats *Rosh Chodesh* halfway as a weekday, halfway as a holiday, which accounts for the placement of this *Musaf amidah*.

⁷² See above “The Full Kaddish (Kaddish Titkabal)” p. 17.

⁷³ See above “

The Mourner’s Kaddish” p. 16.

Alenu

For more on this section, see TPAAJ p. 212-213 and AS p. 480-482

Alenu is one of the most well known prayers. It is found towards the end of every single Jewish prayer service. The first paragraph speaks of how we are duty-bound to give praise to God, and of our pride that we serve God and not any false gods. It speaks of God's grandeur and that God alone is God. The second paragraph is a prayer of messianic hope. During the first paragraph, it is customary to bend our knees as we say **וְאֶנְחָנוּ כּוֹרְעִים** *We bend our knees* and to bow as we say **וְמַשְׁפִּתְחִים** *and bow.*⁷⁴

THE CONTINUATION OF THE SABBATH/HOLIDAY MORNING SERVICE

For more on this section, see AS p. 476-488 & p. 12, and TPAAJ p. 210-215.

After the Torah is returned to the ark (and usually after a sermon), the *Musaf Amidah* is recited on Sabbath and Holidays. Recall that different *Amidahs* are recited based on which day it is, and that the *AmidahIn Musaf* will talk about the sacrifices that were made during the Sabbath or the particular holiday being celebrated.⁷⁵ The concluding prayers for a Sabbath/holiday morning are more lengthy than on weekdays. They include:

- Ayn Kelohenu (AS p. 476), a hymn about how there is no one like God.
- A set of rabbinic texts followed by *Kaddish Derabanan*⁷⁶ (AS p. 476-480). Many synagogues skip this part.
- Alenu (AS p. 480-482), see above section on p. 38.
- Mourner's Kaddish, see above section on p. 16.
- *Anim Zemirot* (AS p. 484-486) a mystic poem ascribed to 12th century German scholar and mystic Rabbi Yehudah Hachasid. Followed by Mourner's Kaddish.
- Psalm of the day (Saturday AS p. 488, Weekdays AS p. 162-164) followed by Mourner's Kaddish. In many synagogues these Psalms are said elsewhere in the service.
- Adon Olam (AS p. 12), a hymn praising God as Master of the Universe.

⁷⁴ As it happens, my research has indicated that these two verbs should be translated “we bow” and “we prostrate” respectively.

⁷⁵ See above “Additions to the Amidah For Specific Days” p. 22.

⁷⁶ On *Kaddish Derabanan* see p. 18.

MINCHA: THE AFTERNOON SERVICE

Mincha is the shortest service. This is largely because it is recited in the afternoon, at a time where most people are hard at work. Mincha consists of the following:

- Ashrei.⁷⁷
- On Saturdays and holidays only *Kedusha Desidrah*.⁷⁸
- On Saturdays only: Half Kaddish⁷⁹ followed by Torah reading. Three *aliyahs* from the next weeks *parsha*, just like on the succeeding Monday and Thursday.⁸⁰
- Half Kaddish.
- The *Amidah*⁸¹ and repetition.
- Tachanun⁸². On Saturday A brief paragraph on top AS p. 524 is recited instead of Tachanun.
- Full Kaddish.⁸³
- Alenu.⁸⁴
- Mourner's Kaddish.⁸⁵

MA'ARIV: THE EVENING SERVICE

Ma'ariv consists of the following:

- The Shema and her blessings.⁸⁶ On Friday nights, some synagogues recite *veshameru*, Exodus 31:16-17 at this point. This paragraph talks about the Israelites keeping the Sabbath.
- Half Kaddish⁸⁷
- The *Amidah*⁸⁸ without repetition. There is no repetition, as during the time that the repetition developed, the evening prayer was still considered optional, so there was less worry about those who were not capable of reciting their own Amidah. **On Friday night we recite Genesis 2:1-3⁸⁹ followed by a “mini repetition” which can be found at AS p. 346-348.** This was likely added because of the higher number of people who attended Friday night services, and wanting to give

⁷⁷ See footnote 59, p. 34.

⁷⁸ See above footnote 70 p. 37.

⁷⁹ See p. 15.

⁸⁰ See above section on Torah reading p. 35.

⁸¹ See above section on the *Amidah*, p. 19

⁸² See above, “On Most Weekdays, Tachanun is Recited. p. 34

⁸³ See p. The Full Kaddish (Kaddish Titkabal)

⁸⁴ See p. 38.

⁸⁵ See p. 16.

⁸⁶ See p. 26.

⁸⁷ See p. 15.

⁸⁸ See above section on the *Amidah*, p. 19

⁸⁹ Which talks about the world having been completed before God rested on the 7th day.

later comers time to finish before everyone else left to go home (similar to what was discussed above at footnote 46 p. 27.

- On Saturday night only: Half Kaddish followed by some extra prayers including *Kedusha Desidrah*.⁹⁰ (AS p. 594-598)
- Full Kaddish.⁹¹
- Alenu.⁹²
- Mourner's Kaddish.⁹³

FRIDAY NIGHT SERVICES (*KABBALATH SHABBAT*)

For more on this section, see TPAAJ chapter 13 & AS p. 308-328.

In approximately the 16th Century (relatively recent in terms of Jewish practice), certain mystics designed the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service. *Kabbalat Shaabbat* means welcoming the Sabbath. This service features Psalms 95-99, Psalm 29, a song called *Lecha Dodi*⁹⁴ composed in the 16th Century, Psalm 92-93, and then Mourner's Kaddish.⁹⁵ There is a reading of rabbinic scripture concerning the laws of the lighting of Sabbath candles, as well as a few short pieces of rabbinic homily, followed by "The Rabbi's Kaddish" p. 18.

Following *Kabbalat Shabbat*, the evening service continues as above.

⁹⁰ See above footnote 70 p. 37.

⁹¹ See p. The Full Kaddish (Kaddish Titkabal)

⁹² See p. 38.

⁹³ See p. 16.

⁹⁴ The refrain translates to "Come my beloved to greet the bride – let us welcome the Sabbath."

⁹⁵ See p. 16.

JEWISH LITERATURE FROM THE TORAH TO TODAY

GOALS OF THIS SECTION

Primarily, our goal is to learn what is out there in Jewish literature. I anticipate that in doing so, we should also get more understanding of how the Jewish religion developed, how Jewish law is determined, and perhaps a bit about Jewish philosophy as well.

SOURCES

Encyclopedia Judaica's CD-ROM edition has been invaluable in preparing this material. The entry on "Jewish Literature" has helped insure that we will cover all the bases. I highly recommend that entry. Additionally, Encyclopedia Judaica is an excellent place to go for an erudite and concise discussion of just about anything in Judaism. For a briefer synopsis, I recommend "The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion," ed. Werblowsky & Wigoder, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1966, which I also used in preparing this text.

THE BIBLE

The Bible is, of course, the original and foundational scripture of Judaism (and other religions too, of course). The Bible covers about 900 years of literary work, and an even greater range of history is covered in it. Generally, the selection of what books were included in the Bible was set by approximately 250 B.C.E. However, debates over the inclusion of some books (particularly The Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes) remained until late in the first century. Biblical books rarely make any claims of authorship. Rabbinic tradition treats the Five Books of Moses as direct revelation of God at the time of Moses, and the later books as having been penned by certain prophets. Modern critics have other thoughts, and the theological response to modern criticism has been varied.

In Judaism, the Bible as a whole is referred to as "The Written Torah" or "Torah *shebichtav*." This is in distinction with Rabbinic writings, that were known as "*Torah shebe'al peh* - The Oral Torah," as much of that material was created over the years and passed down orally.⁹⁶

As we study the Bible, we are interested in gaining a feel for the subdivisions of the Bible, and to get a general idea of the theme of each book.

⁹⁶ The word "Torah" literally means "teaching" or "instruction. See the Glossary entry under "Torah" for an explanation of the varied uses of the term Torah.

TANA"CH - THE THREE MAJOR SUBDIVISIONS OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is broken into three major subdivisions. These are known by the Hebrew acronym תְּנָא"כָה - *Tanach*. This breaks down as:

- תָּנָךְ = *Torah*. This refers to the Five Books of Moses. It is these five books that are combined in the Torah scroll.
- נְבִיאִים = *Nevi'im* (Prophets). This refers to the books which discuss the life and times of the Prophets in Israel.
- כְּתُובִים⁹⁷ = *Ketuvim* (Writings). This includes a varied set of literature including prayers and psalms, philosophical explorations, and apocalyptic literature, and poetry.

Each of these three major subdivisions is further broken into individual books. Traditionally, all of these books were given thematic titles. Some (particularly in *Torah*), however, have come to be known by one of the first words that appears in the book. We will discuss some of these different names as we go along.

⁹⁷ Remember that כ is replaced by the letter כ at the end of a word.

The Books of The Bible

ת (Ta)	נ (Na)	כ (Ch)
תורה = Torah	נביאים = Nevi'im (Prophets).	כתובים = Ketuvim (Writings).
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. בְּרָאָשִׁית (Genesis) 2. שָׁמֹות (Exodus) 3. ל. יְקָרָא (Leviticus) 4. בְּמִדְבָּר (Numbers) 5. דְּבָרִים (Deuteronomy) 	<p>Former Prophets</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. יְהוֹשֻׁעַ (Joshua) 2. שׁופְטִים (Judges) 3. שְׁמוֹאֵל א' (I Samuel) 4. שְׁמוֹאֵל ב' (II Samuel) 5. מֶלֶכִים א' (I Kings) 6. מֶלֶכִים ב' (II Kings) <p>Latter Prophets</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. יְשַׁעְיָהוּ (Isaiah) 2. יְרֵמִיאָהוּ (Jeremiah) 3. יְחִזְקָאֵל (Ezekiel) 4. <i>The Twelve "Minor" Prophets</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. הֹסֵעַ (Hosea) b. יוֹאֵל (Joel) c. עָמוֹס (Amos) d. עֲבָדִיה (Obadiah) e. יוֹנָה (Jonah) f. מִיכָּה (Micah) g. נָחוֹם (Nachum) h. חֲבָקּוּק (Habakuk) i. צְפָנִיאָה (Zephaniah) j. חָגָי (Chagai) k. זְכָרִיאָה (Zechariah) l. מַלְאָכִי (Malachi) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. תְּהִלִּים (Psalms) 2. מִשְׁלִי (Proverbs) 3. אַיּוֹב (Job) 4. שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים (Song of Songs) 5. רׂוֹת (Ruth) 6. אַיִּכָּה (Lamentations) 7. קְהֻלָּת (Ecclesiastes) 8. אֶسְתֵּר (Esther) 9. דָנִיאֵל (Daniel) 10. עֶזְרָא (Ezra) 11. נְחֵמִיאָה (Nechemiah) I. דָבְרֵי הַיּוֹם א' (Chronicles) II. דָבְרֵי הַיּוֹם ב' (Chronicles)

Torah – The Five Books of Moses

1) Bereshit - Genesis

Genesis is known in Hebrew בְּרֵאשִׁית = (*Bereshit*, in the beginning). This book covers:

- Chapters 1-2 The creation of the world
- Chapters 3-5: The story of Adam and Eve (presented as the first humans, though there are significant philosophical and literary arguments as to how literally this should be taken), including their expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the story of Cain and Abel, and a recounting of Adam and Eve's progeny through Noah.
- Chapters 6-11: The story of Noah and the flood, including a listing of Noah's progeny, through Abraham. Includes the story of the Tower of Babel (11:1-9).
- 12:1-25:18: The story of the first Patriarch, Abraham, including the story of the Binding of Isaac and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- 25:19-Chapter 36: The story of the second and third patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob (Isaac, the classic “Middle Patriarch,” is not terribly active, so a lot of the story really focuses on Jacob).
- Chapter 37-50: The story of Joseph, his being sent to Egypt and his success there. This includes his reunion with his father, and Jacob's meeting Pharaoh as well as Jacob's farewell to his sons.

In his Encyclopedia Judaica entry under “Genesis,” Nahum Sarna identifies the following as the major themes teachings of Genesis:

- God's creation of the Earth as an individual, as opposed to a pagan pantheon.
- The importance of Man in God's creation.
- Evil as a result of humanity's free will as opposed to being a metaphysical part of the world.
- Humanity is brought to account for its misdeeds (punishment of Cain, the flood as response to human corruption, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah).
- The common ancestry of all of Humanity (from Adam and Eve and Noah and his family as the only survivors of the flood).
- Divine election of certain characters (Noah, Abraham, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau).
- God's covenantal relationship with humanity (Noah and the Patriarchs).
- God's presence is felt on the human scene.

2) Shemot - Exodus

Known in Hebrew traditionally as **ספר יציאת מצרים** (*sefer yetsiat Mitzrayim*, the book of the departure from Egypt, hence “Exodus”), but now generally known as **שמות** (*Shemot*, Names) after the second word in the book. This book includes:

- Chapters 1-15:21: Slavery in Egypt, Moses sent as a messenger of God to take Israel out of Egypt. Plagues, parting of the Red Sea, etc.
- 15:22-Chapter 17: Beginnings of the Israelite’s trek through the Sinai wilderness towards Israel. Includes some troubles (e.g. with food and water, attack by Amalek, etc.) and a visit from Moses’ father in law who teaches Moses how to set up a court system.
- Chapters 19-24: The covenant at Sinai including the revelation at Sinai, the “Ten Commandments⁹⁸” and their acceptance by the Jewish people. There is a plethora of other laws presented in this section, including rules regarding slavery, homicide and assault, holidays, etc.
- Chapters 25-40: Instructions regarding the building of, and service in, the *Mishkan*.⁹⁹ This section also includes the sin of the Golden Calf.

In his section on “Exodus” in Encyclopedia Judaica, Moshe Greenberg identifies the following themes of Exodus:

- The birth of a nation through departure from Egypt and revelation at Sinai.
- God’s immeasurable power (plagues, Red Sea, etc.).
- Conditional covenant between God and Israel (as opposed to the unconditional covenant with the Patriarchs). Israel must follow God’s laws, and God will protect them and prosper them. This covenant is quite similar in form and spirit to ancient covenants between powerful kings and their vassals.
- The waxing and waning of Israel’s faith in God (panicking at the Red Sea, having “Faith in the Lord and Moses His Servant” (Exodus 14:31) after the parting of the Sea).
- The founding of main institutions of Israel such as the prophet (Moses), the *Cohanim* (priests), God’s dwelling place.

⁹⁸ In my opinion, this title is a slight misnomer. In reading the Ten Commandments closely (Exodus 20:2-14) it is fairly difficult to identify exactly ten commandments. The Torah (Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 4:13 and 10:4) refers to **עשרת הকברין**, which might be translated as “Ten Words,” or “Ten Items.” The Latin term is Decalogue, or “Ten words.” Perhaps a better English term would be “The Ten Statements.”

⁹⁹ **Mishkan:** Lit. “dwelling,” refers to the mobile sanctuary created in the Sinai wilderness, and used as the center of Jewish cult ritual until the building of the Temple in Jerusalem.

3) Vayikra - Leviticus

Known in Hebrew traditionally as **תּוֹרַת כְּהָנִים** (*Torat Kohanim*, the Torah of the Priests, hence “Leviticus”), owing to its concentration on ritual law, but now generally known as **וַיְקָרֵא** (*Vayikra*, “Called”) after the first word in the book. This book includes:

- Chapters 1-7: Description of the different types of sacrifices.
- Chapter 8-10: Account of the beginning of service in the Tabernacle. Includes the installation of the *cohanim*, the death of Nadab and Abihu, for “sacrificing a strange fire,” the consumption (by God) of the original sacrifices.
- Chapters 11-16: Discussion of different sources of impurity and its expiation.
- Chapters 17-26: “The Holiness¹⁰⁰ Code.” Includes dietary laws, civil laws, disqualifications from the Mishkan and from sacrifices, Jewish holidays, etc. Each of these laws are viewed as a manifestation of holiness. “You shall be Holy, because I, The LORD your God am holy.” (Leviticus 19:2)¹⁰¹
- Chapter 27-34 Discussion of gifts that can be given or pledged to the Temple.

4) Bamidbar - Numbers

Known traditionally as **חוּמֶשׁ פְּקוּדִים** (*Chumash Pekudim*, The Scroll of Numbers, hence “Numbers”) because of the two censes of the Israelites taken in the book, but now generally known as **בְּמִדְבָּר** (*Bamidbar*, “In the Wilderness”) after the fifth word in the book. This book covers:

- Chapters 1-10: Remaining description of the Israelite’s sojourn at Sinai. Census of the people, particularly of those eligible for military service. Description of the arrangement of the camp in the wilderness. Procedure for marching through the wilderness. Rules of Nazarite vows, descriptions of offerings of tribal leaders to the tabernacle. Description of trumpets created to warn of war, and announce moving of the camp, as well as the pronouncement Moses would make when the Tabernacle was moved (*vayehi binso’ah*, Numbers 10:35-36)).
- Chapters 10-22: The Israelites enter the area of the East bank of Jordan. This section contains laws such as the wearing of *tsitsit* (15:35ff) and the use of a Red Heifer to remove impurity due to contact with the dead. There are also many narratives, e.g.:
 - Description of the manna the Israelites ate in the desert (Chapter 11).
 - Initiation of 70 elders to remove some of the burdens from Moses (Chapter 11).

¹⁰⁰ In Judaism, the word *kedusha*, translated as holiness has more of a nuanced meaning. It includes a sense of being distinct.

¹⁰¹ This verse reflects the notion of *imitatio dei* – that we should endeavor to emulate God.

- A particularly ugly story regarding Moses sister and brother, Aaron and Miriam complaining about Moses marrying a Kushite woman. Miriam is stricken with leprosy (perhaps her skin turning white in return for her complaints about the dark skinned woman), and Moses prays for her recovery (chapter 12).
- Spies are sent to Israel, and frighten the Israelites into questioning their ability to capture the land. In return for their lack of confidence, God says that the entire generation that left Egypt would have to die out before the Israelites entered Israel (Chapter 13).
- The execution of a person for violating the Sabbath by chopping wood (15:32-34).
- The rebellion of Korach and cohorts against the powers vested in Moses as leaders, and Aaron as high priest and its aftermath (Chapters 16-17).
- The death of Aaron and Miriam (Beginning and end of Chapter 20). In Chapter 20 we also have the story of Moses hitting, rather than talking to a rock to bring water out of it, and thus failing to “Sanctify God” before the people. We are told that it is due to this sin that Moses and Aaron die in the desert, rather than getting into Israel.
- Military conquest of Transjordan (Chapter 21-22:1).
- Chapters 22-35 Israel in Transjordan, including:
 - Chapters 22-24: The hiring of the sorcerer Balaam to curse Israel, which he is unable to do.
 - Chapter 25: The enticement of the Israelite men by Moabite women to sacrifice to Midianite Gods, and Pinheas (acting on God’s command) kills an Israelite man and Midianite woman who are committing a public act of immorality. Pinheas is congratulated for his zealousness for God.
 - The dividing of the land of Israel to the tribes.
 - The argument of the daughters of Zelophehad that in absence of sons, a man’s daughters should inherit his property (27:1-11). Their argument is granted, but they are not allowed to marry out of the tribe, so that tribal property not switch to another tribe.
 - Chapters 28-29: Prescriptions of sacrifices.
 - Chapter 30: Regulations regarding validity of vows made by men and women.
 - Chapter 31: Defeat of Midian.
 - Chapter 32: The granting of a request by some tribes to inherit land in Transjordan, rather than in Israel.
 - Chapter 33-35: List of the encampments of Israel, and discussion of how the land of Israel would be divided.

In his Encyclopedia Judaica entry under “Numbers,” Ivan Caine argues that a major theme of the book of Numbers is the consequences of Jewish failures of faith, failures that we saw during the departure from Egypt but before Sinai went relatively unpunished. However, Israel survives and begins to enjoy military success. The story resonates with the hope that “perhaps in the land of the Covenant (i.e. Israel), the people of the Covenant will fulfill the terms of the Covenant.

5) Devarim - Deuteronomy

Known traditionally as **משנה תורה** (*Mishneh Torah*, The Second Torah, hence “Deuteronomy” – Deutero =2, nomos = law), because in large part it is a recounting of the laws found in Exodus through Numbers, but now generally known as **דברים** (*Devarim* “Words”) after the second word in the book. In large part, the book reads as a series of farewell addresses delivered by Moses, almost entirely presented by Moses in the first person singular, and providing a review of and supplement to the laws commanded by God and Israelite history. It is often fascinating to compare and contrast the report of law and history in Deuteronomy to how it is reported in the other books. Major themes of Deuteronomy include:

- The centralization of sacrifice.
- The stress of monotheism (e.g. *Shema* comes from Deuteronomy 6:4-9),
- A sense of democracy, in that, for instance, the law is to be read to all the people, so that everyone may be advised of their rights.
- The idea that the law is not divine fiat but fundamentally fair and just (see e.g. Deut. 4:5-8).
- The idea of the intimacy of Israel’s relationship with God (see e.g. Deut 4:7 and 4:32).

Nevi’im – The Prophets

From the time of Moses through the time of Ezra, the Israelite community was guided, to a greater or lesser extent, by its prophets. The prophets received communication from God, and brought God’s word to the people. There is evidence that some other communities in the Ancient Near East also had a limited amount of prophecy¹⁰², although certainly the record of Jewish prophecy is far more extensive.

Generally, the section of Prophets is broken into two parts – the **נביאים ראשונים** (“Former Prophets”) and the **נביאים אחרונים** (“Latter Prophets”). The works of the Former Prophets are largely historical – telling the story of the Israelite’s conquest of Israel, their struggles with foreign enemies, the establishment of the monarchy, and the splitting of Israel into a Northern and Southern kingdom. The Latter Prophets are more “preachy,” if you will. They speak of Israel’s iniquities (religious and moral), and that if they don’t mend their ways, the state will be destroyed. They also speak of the hope that a remnant will survive and rededicate themselves to God.

¹⁰² See e.g. the “Prophetic Revelation” subsection in Encyclopedia Judaica’s entry under “Mari.” Mari prophecy was extremely limited in scope, concerned with particular local, material needs. One suspects that the Israelites would not have objected to the idea that prophecy went beyond their community. For instance, Numbers 33:9ff indicates that Balak the sorcerer received prophecy.

The Former Prophets

The former prophets are largely historical works. Worth noting at the outset is the periods that get the greatest concentration. Thus, the entire book of Joshua (24 chapters) covers the period of Joshua's leading the people. The book of Judges (21 chapters) covers countless leaders of the people until Samuel, covering approximately 180 years (ca. 1200 BCE-1021 BCE). The book of Samuel (55 chapters), covers Kings Saul and David, approximately 80 years (ca. 1021-962), and the book of Kings some 400 years C9. 962-581) in 46 chapters.¹⁰³

1) *Yehoshua - Joshua*

The Book of Joshua Tells the story of the prophet Joshua's leadership of the Israelites in their conquest of Israel. We meet Joshua in the *Torah* as Moses' right-hand-man, a military leader, and one of two spies to have confidence in the ability of the Israelites, with God's help, to capture the land of Israel.¹⁰⁴ Moses, at Gods' direction, assigns Joshua as his successor.¹⁰⁵ Upon Moses death, and after an appropriate period of mourning, Joshua leads the people across the Jordan into Israel. The Book of Joshua contains three main sections, chapters 1-12 cover the conquest of Israel (including the famed battle of Jericho), chapters 13-21 cover the dividing of the land amongst the tribes, and chapters 22-24 describe negotiations with some tribes in the area, and Joshua's concluding address. The book of Joshua ends upon Joshua's death.

2) *Shofetim - Judges*

The Book of Judges picks up where Joshua left off. The book tells the story of the leaders of Israel in that period, who were known as *shofetim*, which means judges. Only in the case of one such leader (Devorah) are we given any hint of actual judicial function.¹⁰⁶ In large part, these Judges function as prophets and leaders of military campaigns. Much of the core of Judges follows the pattern of Israelite idolatry, followed by its oppression at the hands of a foreign enemy, which is ended when the Israelites turn to God for help, and God sends a prophet (Judge) to save them. This cycle is followed by a period of tranquility.

The book of Judges includes (following Encyclopedia Judaica's outline):

- 1:1-2:5 The completion of the conquest of Israel, done by individual tribes, unlike Joshua's conquest, which included all tribes.

¹⁰³ This timeline and review of chapters is based on the "Overview of Biblical Books" found in the JPS Bible Commentary Book on Haftorahs.

¹⁰⁴ See Ex. 17:9ff, 24:13, 32:17, 33:11, Num. 11:28, 13:16ff

¹⁰⁵ Num. 27:18ff, 32:12ff, Deut 1:38, 3:28, 31:3ff. Perhaps one of the most powerful set of verses in the TaNa"Ch is Deuteronomy 34:5ff, "And Moses, servant of God, died there in the land of Moab . . . And Israel mourned Moses . . . until the days of mourning for Moses were ended. And Joshua, son of Nun, was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had leaned his hands on him, and Israel listened to him and did as God had commanded Moses, verses capturing both profound loss as well as hope for the future.

¹⁰⁶ Judges 4:4 per Encyclopedia Judaicia.

- 2:6-3:6: An introduction to the cycle of sin, oppression, and redemption (described above).
- 3:7- 11: The story of Othniel, the first judge in Judges.
- 3:12-30: Ehud, who rescues Benjamin from oppression at the hands of the Moabites.
- 3:31: We are told of Shamgar, who defeated the Philistines.
- Chapters 4-5: Deborah and Barak. Jabin, the King of Canaan is oppressing the Israelites (again owing to Israelite idolatry). Deborah and Barak defeat Jabin's general, Sisera, who flees, but is killed by Ya'el in Ya'el's tent. After several battles, Jabin is overwhelmed, and Debora sings a song in celebration.
- Chapters 6-8: Gedon frees the Israelites from the terror of annual raids of the Midianites.
- Chapter 9: Abimelech, son of Gideon, kills off his half-brothers in order to seize power, which he only has for three years before he is killed in rebellion.
- 10:1-5 Tola and Jair are mentioned as judging after Avimelech.
- 10:6-12:7 The cycle of sin and repentance is again mentioned, and then we get to the story of Jephthach, who is contracted by the elders of Gilead to lead them in war against Ammon. Jephthach fails at attempts of diplomacy, and vows to God that if he wins at war, he will sacrifice to God whatever he sees first upon returning home. On his victorious return, he sees his daughter . . .
- 12:8-15: Mention of Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon.
- Chapters 13-16: The story of Sampson. Due to sin, Israel is subjugated to the Philistines for forty years. Sampson's birth is predicted by an angel of God, who tells his mother that she is not to drink wine during pregnancy, and her son is to be a Nazarite (who may not drink wine or cut their hair). Sampson was a person of great strength, wrestling lions (14:5-6). We are told a bit about Sampson's exploits, and then about how Sampson falls in love with Delilah, who coaxes out of him his secret of strength. Delilah has Sampson's hair cut, and Sampson is captured by the Philistines. At a banquet with many Philistine dignitaries, Sampson prays for one more feat of strength, and pulls down the building's supporting pillars, causing the building to collapse, killing all those inside (including Sampson).
- Chapters 17-21 tell varying stories of the troubles of the Israelites, as well as their depravity. A running theme of this section is the statement "in those days there was no king in Israel, each man doing what was right in his own eyes" (17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25), which is likely an argument for the monarchy that will be created in Samuel, the next biblical book.
 - We are told that the tribe of Dan, unable to resist the Philistines, migrate to the north.
 - A Levite visits the town of Gibeah (in Benjamin). The townspeople converge on the house where he is staying, asking that the Levite be sent out, so that they can rape him (See Genesis 19:4-11 for a remarkably similar story in the story of Sodom). The Levite's sends out the Levite's concubine, who is ravaged, and dies. The Levite cuts the woman's body into twelve pieces, sending one piece to each tribe. The Israelites are enraged, and attack the tribe of Benjamin, defeating them. There is some work done to repopulate the tribe of Benjamin after this defeat.

3-4) I-II Samuel

The Book of Samuel (which was originally one book, but was split into two by the Septuagint¹⁰⁷). It was kept as one book in Jewish Bibles until the printing of the Bible in the 15th Century) continues the story of the developing Israelite people, including the beginning of the monarchy, the rivalry of Kings Saul and David, and the life of David. In Encyclopedia Judaica, Norman Gottwald breaks Samuel into six major parts:

- (1) I Samuel 1–7—Samuel.
- (2) I Samuel 8–15—Samuel and Saul.
- (3) I Samuel 16–31—Saul and David.
- (4) II Samuel 1–8—David's rise to power.
- (5) II Samuel 9–20 and I Kings 1–2—Court history or succession story of David.
- (6) II Samuel 21–24—Appendix concerning the reign of David.

A complete listing of all the stories in Samuel is way beyond our abilities here, however, the stories are captivating enough to merit a summary. Some highlights (somewhat based on the “Overview of Biblical Books” found in the JPS Bible Commentary Book on Haftorahs).

- The story of Samuel (1 Samuel 1:1-8:3):
 - Samuel’s birth (1 Samuel 1:1-2:11): We are of *Elkanah* and his two wives, *Channah* and *Peninah*. While *Peninah* has children, *Channah* (English Hannah), much to her chagrin, does not (note *Elkanah*’s lack of sensitivity to her plight in 1 Sam. 1:8). We are told of *Channah*’s going to the Temple (still a temporary tabernacle, currently located in Shilo) during a regular family pilgrimage and praying for a child. She promises that if she has a child, she will give him to divine service. Eli, the High Priest (who ironically, seems, insensitive to religious fervor) thinks she is drunk. He confronts her, but she explains that she is praying for a child. Eli tells her (or prays that) God will answer her prayer. She gives birth, and after weaning the child (called *Shemu’el* – a contraction of *sha’ul me’el* – asked of God) she brings him to the Temple where he remains (don’t worry, his parents visit, and *channah* has 3 sons and 2 daughters – 1 Samuel 2:18-21). She recites a prayer of thanksgiving as well, which predicts a king coming to Israel (1 Sam 2:10), a king which Samuel would later anoint.
 - The depravity of Eli’s house (1:Samuel 2:12-2:36): We are told of the depravity of Eli’s sons including both ritual violations and their sexual immorality with “the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting” (2:22). Eli is unable to control the situation, though he tries. A Man of God tells Eli that the priesthood will be removed from his progeny, and that his two children will be killed on the same day.
 - Samuel’s call (1 Samuel 3): Samuel (already described as being “good before God and Man” in 2:26) is called by God. It takes a couple calls, because Samuel thinks that it is Eli who called him. Eventually, Eli figures out what is happening. God tells Samuel that the judgment of Eli’s house is coming near. Samuel is reluctant to tell Eli what God said, but eventually is forced by Eli to do so. Eli is contrite: “It is God[‘s word], what is good in his eyes he will do.” Samuel continues to have

¹⁰⁷ Septuagint: Greek word for 70, refers to the earliest Greek translation of the Bible, ca. 3rd century BCE. Extremely important for studies of the history of the Bible.

- visions, and everything he tells people is accurate, so Samuel becomes known throughout Israel.
- War with the Philistines (1 Samuel 4-8:3): Israel goes to war against the Philistines. They are being defeated, and so decide to bring the Ark of God (i.e. with the 10 Commandments etc) to be with them. The Philistines are quite afraid of this maneuver, but are victorious and capture the Ark. Eli's two sons are killed in battle. A messenger comes to Shiloh and reports in. Eli hears that his two sons were killed. However, it is when the 92 year old Eli hears that the Ark was captured that he fell back on his throne, broke his neck, and died. Meanwhile, the Philistines have the Ark, which causes them nothing but trouble. It is put in the temple of the god Dagon, and every day Dagon falls over (a kind of “our God is better than your god” thing). The people are also struck with disease. They decide to return the Ark to the Israelites, along with giving gifts to God (some Israelites also die due to looking into the Ark). The Ark is back for a while, and Samuel tells the people that if they destroy their false gods and “direct your heart to God,” God would save them from the Philistines. The people comply, and the Israelites defeat the Philistines. We are told that Samuel judged the people for all his life, and that as he aged he appointed his sons to do the same, but his sons did not judge honestly.
 - Samuel and Saul (1 Samuel 8:4-15:35): The elders of Israel ask Samuel to appoint a King, seeing as how Samuel is old and his children are dishonest. Samuel sees this as a rejection of God (i.e. the people should be led by God through the prophet), but God tells him to listen to the request (telling Samuel that the request is a rejection of God, not of Samuel). Samuel warns them that a king will likely abuse his power, but the people insist. Saul (self described as a member of a minor clan of Benjamin, the smallest of tribes 9:21) is anointed as King. Samuel gives an eloquent prophecy to the people about their history and telling them that if they and their king follow God’s ways, all will be good, but if not . . . (see chapter 12). We are told of some battles which Saul leads. Saul twice fails to follow Gods orders. In Chapter 13, while preparing for battle against the Philistines he offers sacrifices without waiting for Samuel. The indication is that the Israelites were beginning to scatter because nothing was being done, so Saul did what he thought was appropriate. The second transgression (Chapter 15) is when Saul is commanded to avenge the Amalekites, who had attacked the Israelites on their way out of Egypt. Saul is commanded to destroy the Amalekites – men, women and livestock. Instead, Saul leaves Amalekite king and choice livestock and other choice items. Saul tells Samuel that “the people spared the choices sheep and oxen in order to sacrifice to *A-donay* our God.” When the people want to bring these sacrifices, Samuel asks them rhetorically “Does God prefer offerings and sacrifices above listening to God’s instructions, listening is better than a good sacrifice.” Due to his failures in following God, God rejects him as king (though he is not formally deposed). This paves the way for David to become king.
 - Saul and David (1 Samuel 16-2 Samuel 1:31):
 - David is anointed (1 Sam. 16:1-13) God tells Samuel that God has chosen a son of Jesse to be king, and sends Samuel to anoint him. As Samuel sees one of Jesse’s sons, he presumes (probably based on his appearance) that this is the son to be anointed. God says, “Do not look at his appearance and is height, because I have rejected him, because [I don’t see] as man sees, because man sees what is visible, and God sees the heart.” (16:7). After meeting seven of Jesse’s sons, Samuel finds that

- none of them are the one chosen by God. He has Jesse send for Jesse's youngest son, David. Upon seeing David, Samuel anoints David. At that point, David is gripped by the Spirit of God.
- Saul is gripped by an evil spirit (1 Sam. 16:14-23): In contrast to David in the preceding verse, Saul is terrorized by an evil spirit from God. Saul and his courtiers decide to hire a person to play the lyre in order to calm Saul. Ironically, David is hired for the job.
 - David and Goliath (1 Sam. 17) The Philistines mass for war against Israel. Their champion, the giant Goliath taunts the Israelites, and challenges them to send a champion to do one-on-one battle. When David (originally not part of the battle – he came on his father's orders to deliver food to David's brothers), David asks "Who is that uncircumcised Philistine that defies the ranks of the living God?" David stands up to Goliath. A ritual battle ensues, in which Goliath curses David by Goliath's gods. David responds, "You come against me with sword, spear, and javelin, and I come against you with the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the rank of Israel which you have defied. Today . . . the whole land will know that there is God in Israel.: David defeats Goliath by striking him in the forehead with a sling-projected rock. The Philistines flee in fear upon seeing their champion killed. The Israelites give chase, killing many Philistines.
 - Saul is threatened by David (1 Sam. 18-20): David becomes a part of Saul's Court, and is triumphant in battle. We are also introduced to David's close relationship with Saul's son, Jonathan¹⁰⁸ (18:1-3). Saul is threatened by David's popularity and abilities, and attempts several times to have David killed, for instance by sending David on what Saul believes is a hopeless mission. Saul orders Jonathan and all Saul's servants to kill David, but Jonathan talks him out of it. Later on, Saul again wants to kill David and Michal, Saul's daughter and David's wife, helps him escape. Later, Jonathan confirms Saul's intent to kill David, and David flees.
 - David in exile (1 Sam. 21-31): The text describes David's flight from Saul at great length, as well as Saul's search for David. David amasses a small band of people with him. They fight a battle against the Philistines who are raiding the town of Keliah (1 Sam. 23). At one point (1 Sam 24), Saul leaves his entourage and enters a cave where David is hiding. David has the opportunity to kill Saul, but refuses on the grounds that Saul is God's anointed king After Saul leaves the cave, David confronts him with this information, in order to demonstrate that David is not a threat to Saul. Saul is convinced, says that he knows that David will become Kingm and asks David to take an oath that he will not go after Saul's children (which David accepts). In chapter 25 we are told of David's rivalry with Nabal, who eventually dies of natural causes. David marries Nabal's widow. Chapter 26 has Saul once again chasing after David. David sneaks into Saul's camp while Saul is sleeping, but again refuses to injure Saul, because Saul is God's anointed King. David takes Saul's spear and water, again using it to demonstrate that he could have killed Saul if that were his intent. Saul admits the error of his ways. In Chapter 27 David flees to Philistine territory so that Saul wouldn't come after him. David goes raiding against the Amalekites and others. In Chapter 28, Achish, King Achish, who had allowed David

¹⁰⁸ Note that Jonathan is heir to Saul's throne.

to settle in Philistine territory is set to go to war against the Israelites. Saul is fearful, and his cries to God go unanswered. He decides to go to someone who consults with ghosts (a practice which he himself had forbidden, and of course is forbidden by Deuteronomy 18:11). He asks for the ghost of Samuel (who we were told had passed away in 1 Sam. 25:1 and 28:3). Samuel's ghost tells Saul that he will be defeated, and he and his son will be killed. As the Philistines go to battle, with Achish and David and David's entourage in the back, the Philistines get Achish to send David home, because they believe David will betray them. David returns to his land, and defeats again is victorious in a battle with the Amalekites (Chapter 30). The Philistines resoundingly defeat the Israelites. Three of Saul's sons (including Jonathan) are killed. Saul is badly wounded. He asks his arms-bearer to kill him. Saul's servant is too afraid to do so, so Saul falls on his sword (seeing this, Saul's servant falls on his own sword). The Israelites see that Saul has died, and flee. Israel is occupied by the Philistines.

- The Rise of David (2 Samuel 1-10): David receives a report of the death of Saul and Jonathan. Note that the reporter claims that Saul asked him to finish him off, and that the reporter had complied, and taken Saul's crown and armlet to bring to David. David and his group "weep and fasted until the night, for Saul and Jonathan his son, and for the nation of God, and for the house of Israel which fell by the sword." (2 Sam. 1:12). David has the reporter killed for having killed God's anointed king. We are told of the dirge which David intoned about Saul and Jonathan. "Your glory, Israel, lie slain in your heights, how the mighty have fallen." (2 Sam. 1:19, trans JPS). "Saul and Jonathan, the beloved and cherished – in their lives and in their deaths they never parted¹⁰⁹ – they were quicker than eagles, and stronger than lions." (1:23) "I am pained over you, my brother Jonathan, you were quite beloved to me, your love was more profound to me than the love of women." (1:26). David, on God's instructions, then goes to Hebron in Judah, where he is anointed as King of over Judah. Meanwhile, Saul's general Abner appoints Ish Bosheth ("man of shame") as king over "Gilead, Ashur, Jezerl, Ephraim, Benjamin, and all Israel." We are told that only Judah was loyal to David. The forces of Abner/Ish Bosheth and David do battle, in which David's forces are victorious. Later on (Chapter 3) Abner and Ish Bosheth have a falling out, and Abner offers to help David consolidate his rule. However, before he can do so, Abner is killed by Yoav, a David loyalist who doesn't trust Abner. Abner's death causes panic amongst the Israelites (i.e. those in Ish Bosheth's camp). Two of Ish Bosheth's commanders assassinate him while he is sleeping, bringing his head as a trophy to David. David recalls that he killed the person who claimed to have killed Saul, and says "all the more so these evildoers who killed a righteous person in his house on his bed, shall I not avenge his blood from your hands, and remove you from the earth?" (2 Sam. 4:12) With the death of Ish Bosheth and Abner, all tribes of Israel come to David, make a covenant with him, and anoint him King of Israel (2 Sam. 5:3). David conquers Jerusalem from the Jebusites, and David builds a palace there (2 Sam. 5:5-9, 11). David continues to defeat the Philistines in battle. David then begins to move the Ark of the Covenant (i.e. which held the Ten Commandments) to Jerusalem. The ark is moved amid celebratory song and dance. During the trip, the oxen stumble, and Uzzah reaches

¹⁰⁹ The loyalty and love that Jonathan paid to both Saul and David is quite worthy of note, seeing as how these two loyalties were so often in conflict.

out to the Ark for support. God is angered at Uzza, who dies. David is greatly upset, and scared to continue transporting the ark, instead leaving it at the house of Obed-edom. During the three months that the ark is there, Obed-edom succeeds greatly, and so David decides again to work on moving the Ark to Jerusalem. David dances and celebrates as the ark travels, drawing the ire of Michal daughter of Saul, who feels such levity inappropriate. Upon bringing the Ark to Jerusalem (in chapter 6), David is struck by the contrast of his permanent palace, and the temporary tabernacle which houses the Ark. He shares his thoughts with the prophet Nathan, who tells David to do what he pleases, “because God is with you.” However, in a dream at night God tells Nathan to say to David, “Will you build a house for me to dwell? I have not dwelled in a house from the days that I took the Children of Israel out of Egypt until today, rather I went about in Tent and Tabernacle. As I traveled with all of the Children of Israel, did I say a word with any of the leaders of Israel whom I commanded to guide my nation Israel saying: ‘Why have you not built me a house of cedar.’” (2 Sam. 7:5-7). God says that he will help David defeat Israel’s enemies and “I will make you a dynasty”¹¹⁰ and will not forsake that dynasty as God did with Saul. David’s son will build a temple for God.¹¹¹ In chapter 8 David defeats the Philistines (for a change), the Moabites (who become vassals), Hadadezer son of Reho, king of Zobah (plus the Arameans who came to Hadadezer’s aid, and ended up vassals of David). Hearing of David’s conquests, Toi, King of Hamath asks David for a peace treaty, sending gifts for such. We are told at the end of Chapter 7 that King David reigned over his people with justice, and some of David’s ministers are identified. In Chapter 9 David looks for remnants of the House of Saul in order to keep his promise to Jonathan. A servant from the House of Saul is identified. The servant identifies a son of Saul who was lame in both feet (the circumstances of his injury are reported in 2 Samuel 4:4). David gives him all the land that was Saul’s property, and he (Mephibosheth) ate regularly at the King’s table. Similarly, in Chapter 10 David looks to reward Hanun ben Nachash, king of Ammon who had died, because of the King’s protecting David’s parents while David fled from Saul (see 1 Sam. 22:1-4). David sends dignitaries to console the Hanun, but the Hanun’s advisors tell him that David is really sending spies against them. They reject (and embarrass) the dignitaries. Realizing that they had offended David, and expecting reprisal. The Ammonites amass an army to attack David. They are resoundingly defeated.

- David’s Sin and the Aftermath (2 Samuel 11-20) This section tells us of David’s great sin, and the travails that beset his family as a result.
 - David and Batsheva (2 Samuel 11-12): During a war against Ammon, David sees Batsheva, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. David sleeps with her, and she becomes pregnant. When David gets word from Batsheva of her pregnancy, David sends for Uriah (who was at the front). David tries to get Uriah to go to his home, but he refuses, “The Ark of Israel and Judah sit in Sukkoth, and my master Yoav and your servants are encamped in the fields, and I should go to my home to eat, drink, and lie

¹¹⁰ Literally “I will make you a house” – God will do for David, what David intended to do for God.

¹¹¹ Note the role of the prophet. Nathan OK’s David’s plan without consulting with God. God then corrects the plan, but does not seem to imply that Nathan spoke out of turn. It seems that the wise counsel of the prophet was proper even without direct revelation.

with my wife? By your life, and by the life of your soul, I shall not do so!" (2 Sam. 11:11) Unable to cover up the affair, David sends Uriah back to the front, with a note for Yoav, telling Yoav to arrange for Uriah's death in battle (11:14-15). Uriah is killed in battle, and David takes Batsheva as a wife. God is none too happy with David, and dispatches the prophet Nathan with a message of impending doom. David is apologetic about his misdeeds. Nathan says that David will not die, but the child he is expecting will die. The child takes sick. David prays and fasts for him, but to no avail. David consoles Batsheva on the death of her son. Batsheva later gives birth to Shelomo (Solomon), who we are told finds God's favor (2 Sam. 12:24).

- Avshalom and Tamar (2 Samuel 13-14): David's son Amnon is attracted to his beautiful half-sister Tamar, full sister of Avshalom (English Absalom). Amnon rapes Tamar. Two years later, Avshalom has his servants kill Amnon. Avshalom flees. Eventually, David is consoled from Amnon's death, and begins to miss Avshalom. Eventually, Avshalom is welcomed to return to Jerusalem, but a long time passes before Avshalom is brought to the palace to see David.
- Avshalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 15-20): Avshalom begins to play politics to win favor with people, and declares himself King. David flees Jerusalem with an entourage, including the *cohanim* and the Ark, but David tells the *cohanim* to go back to Jerusalem with the Ark. David sends Hushai the Archite to be a spy in Avshalom's court. We are told of David's trek, and his meeting both ally and enemy along the way. We are told of Avshalom's behavior in Jerusalem, including having relations with David's concubines.¹¹² Avshalom decides to muster a great force from the Israelites and attack David, a plan created, and then passed on to David by Hushai. David flees across the Jordan. David amasses the troops that are with him, splitting them into three parts, each under a commander. He intends to go to battle with them, but they tell him to stay behind, as his death would be too great a moral defeat. David instructs his three commanders "Be gentle with the boy Avshalom for my sake." (1 Sam. 18:5). David's troops win the battle. Avshalom gets himself stuck in a tree, but David's soldier who found him does not lay a hand on him due to David's orders. Yoav (one of the three commanders) drives three darts into Avshalom's heart, and then others finish him off. Achimaz son of Zadok (a priest) brings news of the defeat of Avshalom's troops, and David's first question is whether Avshalom is safe. Achimaz does not answer. A second messenger brings the same report of victory, and upon receiving the same question from David, tells David that Avshalom died. David is shaken, cries, and says "My son Avshalom, my son Avshalom, if only I had died instead of you, Avshalom, my son, my son." (2 Sam. 19:1). When the people hear of David's reaction, the victory celebration turns into mourning. Yoav criticizes David sternly: "Today you have embarrassed all of your servants . . . by loving your enemies and hating your friends, for you have demonstrated today that your officers and servants mean nothing to you, because I know that if only Avshalom had lived, and we all died today, then it would be acceptable in your eyes. Now, go and speak

¹¹² This fulfills part of what Nathan told David would happen because of the Batsheva incident (2 Sam. 12:11). Also interesting is that Avshalom is doing this in order to solidify the sense that he has replaced David, and therefore does his misdeed on the roof (2 Sam. 16:22) – the same roof from which David had first taken an interest in Batsheva (2 Sam. 11:2).

to your servants for I swear by God that if you do not go out . . . that would be worse for you than all the evil which has befallen you from your youth until today.” (2 Sam. 19:6-8) David does come out to greet his people. We are told of Davids return to Jerusalem, and his pardoning some of Avshalom’s loyalists, particularly those of Saul’s family, indicating his remaining faithful to Saul and Jonathan.

- Epilogue (2 Samuel 21-24): The book of Samuel ends with several final stories which are presented in a chiastic¹¹³ structure.
 - A: Famine due to Saul’s massacre of the Gibeonites¹¹⁴ (2 Samuel 21:1-14): David asks the Gibeonites what he can do for them, and they ask to massacre some of Saul’s progeny. David agrees (keeping Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan out of the mix). After burying the dead (as well as Jonathan and Saul’s body), “God responded to the plea of the land.”
 - B: Battle with the Philistines (2 Sam. 15-22): There are four more battles with the Philistines.
 - C: David’s song of victory (2 Sam. 22): David sings a song to God, “On the day that God saved him from all his enemies and from the hands of Saul.”
 - C’: David’s last words (2 Sam. 23:1-7): “The declaration of David son of Jesse, the declaration of the man set on high, anointed of the God of Jacob, the favorite song of Israel. The spirit of the lord spoke through me, his word is on my tongue . . .”
 - B’: Stories of David’s heroes during the wars with the Philistines (2 Sam. 23:8-38).
 - A’: Plague due to David’s census (2 Samuel 24): David has a census done of the people. This is a sin, presumably due to Exodus 30:12 “When you count the heads of

¹¹³ **Chiasm:** So named for the Greek letter Chi (X), a chiastic structure is an ABCC’B’A” type of structure and is quite prevalent in the Bible. It comes up both within verses, as well as in the ordering of narratives. It often is used to point to the centrality of the concept in the middle, i.e. the concept that is repeated twice in a row or only once (if the structure is ABBCB’C’). Often writing things out in a pyramid structure will make this structure clear. For example:

Genesis 9:6 *תְּהִלֵּשׁ כְּמַן יָשַׁפֵּעַ שֶׁנָּתַן כְּמַן יָשַׁפֵּעַ who spills blood of man, by man his blood shall be shed.*

A *תְּהִלֵּשׁ* *who spills*

B *שֶׁנָּתַן* *blood*

C *כְּמַן* *of man*

C’ *כְּמַן*, *by man*

B’ *וְמִן* *his blood*

A’ *יָשַׁפֵּעַ* *shall be shed*

For more information see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiastic_structure. A great website with many studies of chiasms is <http://www.inthebeginning.org/chiasmus/xfiles.htm>. Also see below, text accompanying footnote 567 for a discussion of the chiastic structure of the Book of Esther.

¹¹⁴ See Joshua 9:3-27. During the conquest of Israel, the Gibeonites had tricked Joshua into making a peace treaty with them (claiming they were from a far off land). The Israelites kept the treaty, but the Gibeonites were forced to become woodcutters and water-carriers (the most humble of jobs). We are told in this story that Saul had massacred the Gibeonites “in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah.”

the people Israel, let each person give an atonement for his soul to God when you count them, so that there not be a plague amongst them when you count them.”¹¹⁵ David is deeply troubled by his sin, and says to God “I have sinned greatly in what I have done, now, O-God, erase the sin of your servant, for I have been quite foolish” (2 Sam. 24:10). God sends the prophet Gad to David, saying that David must choose one of three punishments: seven years of famine, three months of fleeing from enemies, or three days of pestilence. “And David said to Gad: I am greatly troubled, let me fall into the hands of God for his compassion is great, and let me not fall into the hands of men.”¹¹⁶ A pestilence comes upon Israel. 70,000 people die, but God spares Jerusalem. As David sees what is happening, David says, “I am the one who sinned, and erred, and these are the flock, what have they done, let your hand be upon me and the house of my father.”

SOME THEMES AND THOUGHTS ON THE BOOK OF SAMUEL:

Note these thoughts come in large part from “overview of biblical books” found in the JPS Bible Commentary book on Haftorahs and the Encyclopedic Judaica article on the Book of Samuel.

- Loyalty issues abound, particularly poignant is the position of Jonathan – loyal to his father Saul, but also to his close friend David.
- David’s character is, of course, one of the richest in the Bible. He is a person of great passion and love of God. He is susceptible at the same time to the gravest of sins, and the most remarkable compassion toward his enemies (perhaps to a fault).
- Though Samuel is essentially a work about Kings, the role of the prophet is essential, demonstrating God’s guidance of these events. “Leaders are made and inspired by God; they are not simply self-made achievers of historical or political power.” (JPS).
- The Book of Samuel balances a number of social spheres – home, shrine, and court (JPS).
- A major issue is the place of Monarchy in the Israelite polity, and the benefits and detriments of monarchy.
- Punishment for sins is a major theme as well – the death of Eli’s sons, a famine in response to Saul’s slaughter of the Gibeonites, pestilence for David’s census, rebellion for David’s sin regarding Uriah and Bathsheva . . .

¹¹⁵ I.e. the census was to be done by collection of a tax, rather than counting heads. Due to this prohibition, one is not permitted to count Jewish people. When counting to see if there is a minyan, for instance, people use a 10 word verse, saying one word of the verse for each person.

¹¹⁶ This verse begins is a mainstay of the *Tachanun*, the supplication recited after the Amidah on weekday mornings and afternoons. See above p. 34.

5-6) I – II Kings

The Book of Kings is a continuation of the story from the Book of Samuel, and represents the final part of the *Nevi'im Rishonim*. It tells of Israelite history from the death of King David, through the split of the Israelite kingdom into two, and the eventual destruction and dispersion of each kingdom. This book includes:

- The United Jewish Kingdom (1 Kings 1-11):
 - 1 Kings 1-2:12 The end of King David's Rule & Solomon's succession.
 - 1 Kings 2:13-11:43 Solomon's reign
- 1 Kings 12-2 Kings 17 The Northern and Southern Kingdoms divided through the destruction of the Northern Kingdom
- 2 Kings 18-25:21 The Kingdom of Judah alone through the destruction of the Judaean Kingdom..
- 2 Kings 25:22-30 Epilogue.

Below is a summary:

- The United Jewish Kingdom (1 Kings 1-11):
 - The end of King David's Rule & Solomon's succession (1 Kings 1-2:12): The book of Kings begins by telling us that King David was old. Unable to keep warm, a young woman is hired to lie with him to keep him warm (we are told there was no physical relationship). Adoniya-h, David's oldest living son, brags that he will be king, and begins to amass support. Nathan and Batsheva inform the King (Batsheva reminding David that he had promised that her son, Solomon, would succeed him). David instructs Nathan and Tsadok the Priest to anoint Solomon as King, which is done with much pomp and celebration. Adoniya-h fears Solomon, and Solomon tells him that if he is not combative, Solomon will not do anything to him (which lasts until Adoniya-h asks to marry the woman who had kept King David warm, at which point he is killed¹¹⁷). In Chapter 2, David advises Solomon, particularly telling him (1) To follow God's laws in order to succeed; (2) To take reprisal against certain enemies; (3) To be kind to certain of David's allies. David dies, after having reigned for forty years.
 - Solomon's reign (1 Kings 2:13-11:43) Solomon's reign.
 - 1 Kings 2:13-2:46) Solomon takes care of a number of his enemies per David's instructions, "... and the monarchy was secured in the hands of Solomon (1 Kings 2:46)
 - The Wisdom of Solomon (1 Kings 3-5:14): Solomon goes to sacrifice at Gibeon where there was a major alter (at this time the cult practice was not centralized). God appears to Solomon in a dream, offering Solomon "Tell me what I can give you." Solomon request "A listening heart to judge your people, to understand between good and evil, for who can judge this heavy nation of yours." (1 Kings 3:8). God is quite impressed with this request, and tells him that since he did not

¹¹⁷ It seems to me there were political implications to the request.

ask for years of life, riches or victory over enemies, that Solomon would get both what he asked for, and those things which he did not ask for. We are told the famous story about the two women who argue over who is the mother of a certain child (1 Kings 3:16-28) to demonstrate this wisdom. We are also told about how Solomon administrated his kingdom (another sign of wisdom), and the extent of his kingdom. We are also told of the many proverbs, songs, and discourses which he authored.

- The Construction of the Temple (1 Kings 5:15-9:14): Solomon sets out to build a temple in Jerusalem, as God had told David (2 Sam. 7:12-13). He contracts cedar from Lebanon, and conscripts Israelite workers.¹¹⁸ The temple's construction is given in painstaking detail, particularly as to measurements, materials, and building technique, but with less detail regarding orientation and placement, and fewer details about the related construction of a palace and municipal buildings (EJ). God tells Solomon, "This house which you build, if you follow my laws and ordinances . . . I will fulfill my words to David your father through you. And I will dwell among the People of Israel and not abandon my people Israel."¹¹⁹ In Chapter 8 Solomon calls the leaders of the tribes together for transporting the Ark to the Temple. A cloud descends on the Temple so that the *cohanim* cannot perform the service in the Temple "because the presence of God filled the Temple of God". (1 Kings. 8:10-11). Solomon turns to the people and blesses them.¹²⁰ He tells them of David's desire to build a Temple, and God's saying that David's son would do so, and talks about God's loyalty in fulfilling that promise. Solomon prays that the relationship with God will remain strong, emphasizing that that relationship is conditioned on following God's laws and the ability to repent from sins. He also asks God to accept the prayers and sacrifices of a non-Israelite (1 Kings 8:41-43). He prays "May A-donay our God be with us as [God] was with our ancestors, may he not abandon or forsake us." A seven day celebration follows. Afterwards Solomon has another vision from God, again promising success if Solomon follows Gods ways.
- Solomon's construction projects (1 Kings 9:15-10:29): We are told about more infrastructure created by Solomon (fortified cities, garrison towns, chariot towns, ships, etc). He used conscripted labor, but we are told that the workers were remnants of the other peoples who had once controlled Canaan, and that Israelites were not conscripted (9:20-22). In Chapter 10 we learn about Solomon's accumulation of wealth, including by receiving tributes from others such as the queen of Sheba.
- Solomon's downfall (1 Kings 11): We are told that Solomon loved foreign women, and married women whom Israelites were not supposed to marry, as they

¹¹⁸ He conscripts 30,000 workers, 10,000 each month, rotating 1 month of work in Lebanon and 2 months back home. (1 Kings 6:27-28)

¹¹⁹ Amongst other things, this verse calls to mind Exodus 28:8 with regards to the building of the tabernacle. "Make for me a sanctuary, and I will dwell among them." Many rabbinic homilies focus on the idea that God says that God will dwell among the people, not within the sanctuary.

¹²⁰ This is reminiscent of Moses and Aaron blessing the people at the dedication of the Tabernacle, Lev. 9:23.

would lead Israelites astray.¹²¹ They lead Solomon to perform acts of idolatry. God tells Solomon that the monarchy will be taken from him, except that this sentence would be communited in two ways because of David: First, the downfall would not occur during Solomon's days, and second, his progeny would still rule one tribe. God "raises up" a number of enemies for Solomon. Included in these enemies is Yeravam (Jeroboam) son of Nevat, an Ephramite, who was a servant of Solomon. Ahijah (a prophet) promises Yeravam that he will get control of 10 tribes (to be held in perpetuity if he and his progeny are faithful). Solomon wants to kill Yeravam, who flees. Solomon passes away after ruling for 40 years, and his son Rechavam (Rehoboam) becomes King.

- The Kingdom Divided (1 Kings 12-2 Kings 17): This section of Kings tells a synchronistic history of the Northern and Southern kingdoms. The treatment of each of these kingdoms takes a decidedly anti-Northern-Kingdom bias. A (not so brief) overview of this section follows:
 - The Kingdom splits (1 Kings 12:1-24): The people come to the new king, Rechavam and ask him to lighten the heavy burden of conscription placed on them by Rechavam's father, Solomon¹²². Rechavam considers their request, and consults both his elder and younger advisers. Rechavam accepts the counsel of the younger advisers to tell the people he will be even more harsh and demanding than Solomon (a choice which the narrator tells us was influenced by God's desire to split the kingdom – 12:15). The people choose Yeravam to be their king (creating the "Northern Kingdom" AKA the "Israelite kingdom" AKA "Ephraim", as opposed to the "Southern" kingdom AKA "Judah"), and only Judah and Benjamin remain loyal to Rechavam. Rechavam prepares an army to attack the Northern Kingdom in order to reunify the kingdom, but God tells "Shemayah, the Man of God" to tell Rechavam to call off the attack, because the split of the kingdom is God's decision. Rechavam listens.
 - Northern cult practice begins (1 Kings 12:25-14:21): Yeravam fears that the people will go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and be swayed towards loyalty to Judah. He fashions two golden calves, which he sets up in Bethel and Dan and tells the people that this is "your God, oh Israel who took you out of Egypt."¹²³ Yeravam also sets up non-cohanim to serve as priests in these temples. Chapter 13 tells us of a prophet who comes to condemn this, but Yeravam does not change his course. In Chapter 13, Ahijah (who had previously told Yeravam that Yeravam would be king) prophesies a horrible fate to Yeravam and his family because "you were not like my servant David who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart . . . and you acted evilly and made yourself other gods and images to anger me . . ." (14:8-9). Yeravam dies after having reigned for 22 years, and is succeeded by his son Nadav (14:20).

¹²¹ See Deuteronomy 7:3-4, 23:4, 8-9.

¹²² Recall that previously the narrative seemed to try to minimize the burden that Solomon placed on the Israelites in this conscription.

¹²³ Note that these are the exact words spoken by Aaron when he presented the Israelites with the golden calf (compare Exodus 32:4 and 1 Kings 12:28). It is worth noting that El, a Canaanite god was said to ride on a bull.

- Troubled kingdoms (1 Kings 14:21-16): We are given the succession of kings in Judah and Israel, often with information to help us keep the timelines together E.g. we are Aviyam succeeds his father Rechavam during the 18th year of Yeravam's reign in the north (15:1). Most of the kings keep doing the wrong things and are punished, though from some do some good (e.g. re: Asa, Aviyam's son we are told "did right before God like David his father" getting rid of the prostitutes and removing idols that his ancestors had made. But not getting rid of local shrines¹²⁴). Civil wars exist between the kingdom throughout this period (we are generally told there was war between Northern King X and Southern King Y all of their years).
- Elijah (1 Kings 17-19): Elijah comes on scene with a prophecy of drought to Achav (English Ahab), king of Israel. He goes into hiding in a cave, where there is a wadi that provides water, and ravens bring him meat. When the wadi dries out (due to drought). Elijah continues on to Tsorfat, where he stays with a poor widow. They are able to eat and her "jar of flower did not run out, and her jug of oil did not diminish" (17:16). At one point her son takes sick and "has no breath left in him," but is revived by Elijah, who "stretches over" the child three times, and prays. Elijah is later told to go meet Achav. In 18:16-19 Achav argues that Elijah has caused Israel its problems, but Elijah says that Achav has caused the problems by not following God's ways. Elijah tells Achav to meet him on Mount Carmel along with all Israel and with prophets of some of the false gods. At this meeting, Elijah asks the people "for how long will you keep jumping between two opinions, go after either God or Baal." (17:20). The people do not answer. Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal to a sacrifice-duel. They choose a bull and set it up for a sacrifice. Each sets up a bull on an alter with wood, and the "true" prophet will have a fire come from God to accept that sacrifice.¹²⁵ The false prophets try for hours to have God consume their sacrifice, and it doesn't work. Elijah sets up his sacrifice and (being the showoff that he is) has it doused with water. Elijah prays to God, who consumes the sacrifice. The people fall on their faces and exclaim "Adonai is God! Adonai is God!" (18:39). Elijah has the prophets of Baal killed. Chapter 19 reports that Achav tells *Izevel* (ee-ze-vel, Jezebel) (his wife, a Phoenician who worshipped ba'al - see 16:31- who was also responsible for a campaign of murdering Israelite prophets – see 18:4) what has happened. *Izevel* swears revenge against Elijah. Elijah flees, and ends up at Mount Horeb¹²⁶. Elijah has a divine revelation there.¹²⁷ God tells Elijah to anoint Hazel as

¹²⁴ A common failure which we'll see again and again.

¹²⁵ Similarly, when the tabernacle was dedicated, a flame came down to consume the sacrifice on the alter (Leviticus 9:24).

¹²⁶ Horeb: Another name for Sinai (see e.g. Deuternomy chapter 4 which talks of the Ten Commandments being given at Horeb).

¹²⁷ 1 Kings 19:9-12 is quite fascinating. God asks Elijah why he is there. Elijah says, "I was zealous for A-donay, God of Hosts, for the Children of Israel have abandoned your covenant, they have destroyed your shrines, and killed your prophets by sword, and I alone am left, and they tried to take my life." God tells Elijah, "Go and stand on the mountain before the Lord, and the Lord will pass a great and strong wind, splitting mountains and shattering rocks before the Lord, but the Lord is not in the wind; after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord is no tin the

king of Aram, Yehu ben Nimshi as king of Israel, and Elisha ben Shaphat to succeed Elijah as prophet. God says that between these three anointed people, everyone will get their punishment, and only seven thousand would be left in Israel – the ones who had not knelt before or kissed Baal. Elijah picks up Elisha on his way. Elisha slaughters the oxen that he owns and feeds it to the local people, and then follows after Elijah and becomes his attendant.¹²⁸

- Israelite war with Ben Hadad of Aram (1 Kings 20): King Ben Hadad of Aram amasses group of 32 kings and attacks the Israelites but is defeated as a prophet had predicted to King Achav (20:13-14). Ben Hadad and his people figure the defeat is because “Their God is a God of mountains” (20:23) and so decide to attack in the plains. God is insulted, and again tells the prophet to tell Achav, “Since Aram has said ‘A-donay is a God of mountains . . . I will give this great army into your hands and you will know that I am God.” (20:28) Aram is defeated, but Ben Hadad but he and Achav come to a peace treaty. A prophet informs Achav that God is not happy with this arrangement “Because you have set free a man whom I doomed, your soul shall replace his soul, and your nation will replace his replace.” (20:42).
- The murder of Naboth the Jezreelite (1 Kings 21): Naboth owns a vineyard adjoining Achav’s palace. Achav offers to buy it, but Naboth says that it is his family’s inheritance, so he refuses to sell. *Izevel* has Naboth executed under false charges so Achav can get his land. Elijah is dispatched with God’s message of doom for Achav. Achav fasts and wears sackcloths, a gesture which has some effect, and God says to Elijah, “Have you seen how Achav has humbled himself before me? Because he humbled himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but in the days of his son I will bring evil on his house.” (21:29)
- Israel and Judah unite for battle (1 Kings 22:1-22:40): Achav and *Yehoshafat* (Jehosaphat), King of Judah go to war against Aram. All the prophets tell Achav this is a good idea, except *Michayhu ben Imlah* who explains that the other prophets were being influenced by a “lying spirit.” They go to war nonetheless. The King of Aram not to attack anyone, but just to kill Achav, which they do, and the battle ends.¹²⁹
- Yehoshafat King of Judah & Aziah son of Achav (22:41-51): The story goes back to quick reports of the kings of Judah and Israel. We are told of Yehoshafat (who, we are told, became king during the fourth year of Achav’s reign in Israel). He reigned for 25 years. He did good just as his father Asa, though he too did not remove the local shrines. He also made peace with the King of Israel (as we saw in the last piece with them working together). Upon his death, he is succeeded by *Yehoram* (Jehoram).
- Aziah son of Achav became king in the seventh year of Yehoshafat’s reign and did all the bad things his father did (e.g. worshiping ba’al). 2 Kings begins with the story of Aziah falling through a lattice and being injured. He sends a messenger to *Baal-*

earthquake. After the earthquake fire, but the Lord is not in the fire; after the fire, a still small voice.”

¹²⁸ Elisha plays Joshuah to Elijah’s Moses, if you will.

¹²⁹ As a side note, Achav’s blood runs onto his chariot. When his chariot is washed out in a pool, and the dogs drink the water, it is fulfillment of Elijah’s prophecy that dogs will lick up Achav’s blood. (21:19)

Zevuv (Bealzebub).¹³⁰ God dispatches an angel to Elijah to stop the messengers and send them back with a message for Aziah: “Is it because there is no God in Israel that you go to seek out Baal-Zevuv . . .” (2 Kings 3). Aziah is told by Elijah that he will not recover from his injuries. Aziah sends 50 soldiers to get Elijah. The soldiers find Elijah on top of a mountain, and order him to come down. Elijah has God send a fire to destroy them. This happens with a second 50 men. The third fifty are a bit nicer to Elijah, so Elijah (on God’s orders and reassurances) goes with them and gives Aziah the same prophecy that was given to Aziah’s messengers. Aziah dies and is succeeded by his brother, *Yehoram*, because Aziah had no sons.

- The end of Elijah’s life (2 Kings 2): Elijah is prepared to “be taken up to the heavens in a whirlwind.” He tells Elisha (on several occasions) to stay at a certain place, as Elijah claims God has sent him to a certain place. Elisha refuses to leave Elijah, knowing that Elijah is going to be “taken away.” They end up on the other side of the Jordan, which Elijah split (reminiscent of Moses and Joshua). Elijah asks Elisha what he wants. Elisha asks for a double portion of Elijah’s “spirit” which Elijah says is only possible if Elisha sees Elijah as he is taken to heaven. A chariot comes and takes Elijah to heaven, as Elisha clings to Elijah’s clothing. After Elijah is gone, Elisha parts the Jordan (indicative of his continuing Elijah’s spirit). The sons of prophets (essentially the prophet’s groupies) who were there ask to send out a search party for Elijah, which is to no avail. The narrative tells us of some miracles performed by Elisha.
- War with Moav (2 Kings 3): We are told of *Yehoram*, son of Achav being King in Israel (during the 18th year of Yehoshaphat’s rule in Judah). He does not do what pleases God, though not as badly as his father, and he removes the pillars of Baal which his father had made. Moav (English Moab) had been paying tribute to Achav, but they rebelled when Achav died. Yehoram asks Yehoshafat to join him in putting down this rebellion, and Yehoshafat agrees. During their march, they run out of water. They consult with Elisha, who predicts (accurately) that water will come (which it does) and that they will defeat Moav (which they do, partially because the Moabites see the water coming, and from a distance it had a reddish hue, which led them to believe that their enemy had turned against themselves).
- Elisha’s miracles (2 Kings 4-8:15): One of the wives of the sons of prophets seeks Elisha’s help because her husband is dead, and one of his creditors is trying to take her two children. Elisha (having ascertained that her only asset is a jug of oil) tells her to get lots of empty pots from friends, and to pour oil into them. She does so, and miraculously the oil poured from the one jug fills all the pots. She can sell off the oil, pay the creditors, and live off the rest of the money.¹³¹ We are also told of a wealthy Shunamite woman who would host Elisha when he would come by. She has not had children, and Elisha promises her a son. As the son grows up, he goes out to his father who is harvesting, has head pain, and dies. His mother calls for Elisha, who

¹³⁰ Baal is a god name (we’ve seen the general “Baal” before). *Zevuv* is a fly. Hence: Lord of the Flies.

¹³¹ Compare 1 Kings 7-16 where Elijah and a widow are able to live off one jar of flour and a little oil without it running out.

comes and resuscitates him by placing his body over the boy's body.¹³² There is a famine so that Elisha's followers (the sons of prophets) are quite hungry. Twenty loaves of barley and some fresh grain is brought, Elisha says to feed it to them, although it is not a great amount of food. He says that they should eat it, and there will be left over (which is what happens). Chapter 5 tells of Elisha curing the leprosy of Naaman, a commander of the army of Aram. Elisha refuses to take any payment, and Naaman instead promises that he will only worship God for now on. Elisha's servant Gehazi decides to run after Naaman and ask for payment, which he does, Naaman obliges. Elisha is upset with Gehazi, and tells Gehazi that he will get Naaman's leprosy. Chapter 6 opens with the sons of prophets chopping wood near the Jordan, and an ax falling into the water. Elisha throws a stick into the water, and the ax floats so they can get it back. Then we learn of the king of Aram waging war against Israel. Elisha prophetically reveals their troop movements. The king of Aram sends a group to capture Elisha, but Elisha magically blinds them and leads them to Samaria, where the King of Israel wants to kill them. But Elisha instructs that they are to be fed and given drink, and then sent back to their camp. We are told that after this "Aramean brigands no longer came to the land of Israel. We are told that some time later King Ben-Hadad of Aram besieges Samaria. There is a horrible famine (we are told about mothers eating children). The King of Israel (Yehoram) intends to kill Elisha (blaming him for the problems), Elisha, who is with the elders, has the door held to stop the King's messenger from getting him. When the king shows up at the door, Elisha predicts that the fast will end the next day. The King's servant expresses disbelief, and is told that he will see this come to pass, but will not get to eat the food. Meanwhile, four lepers outside the gate¹³³ decide that rather than starving there, they might as well surrender to the Arameans and see if the Arameans will let them live. They find the Aramean camp deserted. The narrator tells us that God had caused them to hear the sound of chariots and horses, and they figured that Israel had brought in some hired guns, so they ran away in fear. Israel is able to plunder all that they left behind, solving the famine (the aforementioned King's servant is trampled when he is put in charge of the gate and there is a stampede). Chapter 8 has two brief stories about Elisha, one of how Gehazi was telling the Israelite king about Elisha's reviving the woman's son, just as that same woman happened to walk into the King's court, and another about Elisha's prophecy towards King Ben-hadad, of Aram, as well as King Ben-hadad's assassination.

- We are back to bouncing between kings of Israel and Judah, and how they didn't do the right thing. In Chapter 9, Elisha instructs one of the sons of prophets to go to Ramot Gilad and anoint Yehu son of Yehoshafat (a different Yehoshafat than the King of Judah we met before) as King of Israel. Yehu is a commander in Achav's army. The messenger anoints him and tells him to overthrow Achav's house, and thus avenge Achav's and his wife Izevel's misdeed.¹³⁴ Yehu's troops accept him as King. Yehu kills King Yoram, son of Achav, and disposes of his body unceremoniously. He also kills Izevel, who is devoured by animals before he gets a

¹³² Compare Elijah resuscitating the widow's son in 1 Kings 17:17-24.

¹³³ Lepers were quarantined by removing them from the town.

¹³⁴ Recall amongst other things the negative prophesies to Achav in 1 Kings 20:42 and 21:29

chance to bury her. Chapter 10 tells us of Yehu's having the rest of Achav's line killed off, and killing of many of Achav's allies. It's not pretty. However, it is seen avenging misdeeds towards God (see 2 Kings 10:16). He also declares a great feast for Baal in order to draw all of Baal's prophets and worshipers and kill them. The temple of Baal is utterly destroyed, but Yehu does not destroy the golden calves, but God is generally happy with Yehu's performance (10:30-31). Chapter 11 takes us back to Judah, where Ataliah, mother of Achaziyahu,¹³⁵ seeing that her son is dead, trying to kill off the rest of the royal stock. Yoash (AKA Yehoash) son of Achaziah is hidden from her as he grows, and for six years Ataliah reigns in Judah. Yehoyadah the priest arranges an overthrow of Achaziah (also giving chieftans David's spears and quivers that were stored in the Temple). They form a defensive perimeter, and anoint Yoash as king. When Ataliah comes to see what the ruckus is, she is taken and killed (outside of the Temple). "And Yehoyadah made a covenant between God and the King, and between the nation and God, and between the King and the nation." (2 Kings 11:17). The people destroy the temples of Baal (as we saw was previously done in the Northern kingdom). The new King is brought to the palace and ascends the throne, amid a great celebration.

- Chapter 12 tells of how Yehoash did right in God's eyes, through the guidance of Yehoyadah (except of course the people continued to sacrifice in localized shrines, as we have already seen). He sees to it that proper repairs are made to the Temple.¹³⁶ He also turns away an insurrection from Hazael of Aram by paying him off. Meanwhile, back in Israel Yehoachaz son of Yehu is king, and does evil in the eyes of God, so the people are troubled by King Hazael of Aram and Ben Ahadad son of Chazael. When Yehoachaz turns to God, God delivers the people because God sees their suffering. But they continue to do wrong. We are also told that King Yehoash is assassinated by his courtiers.
- Chapter 13 talks of further failure of Israelite kings (now Yehoash (AKA Yoash) son of Yehoachaz. 13:), and of the death of Elisha, who is visited by Yoash, King of Israel who bemoans him as "Father! Father! Israel's Chariots and horsemen."¹³⁷ Chapter 14-15 gives us the next generations of Kings of the two kingdoms. Amtiyahu (Amaziah) son of Yoash in Judah, and Yehoash son of Yehoachaz in Israel. Amtiyahu does right in God's eyes (except, of course, not removing the shrines). Interestingly, he puts to death the courtiers who assassinated his father (see above), but does not kill their children, "As it is written in the Torah of Moses wherein God commanded, saying: Fathers should not be put to death because of the children, nor shall children be put to death for their fathers, each person shall die through his own sin." (2 Kings 14:6, quoting Deut 24:16). He defeats Edom, and then goes to war against the Northern Kingdom. Yehoash resoundingly defeats Amtiyahu and plunders Jerusalem. Yehoash passes away and is succeeded by his son Yeravam (Jeroboam). Sixteen years later Amziyahu is assassinated, and succeeded

¹³⁵ Achaziyahu's reign is briefly described in Chapter 8, and who comes up tangentially in Chapter 9-10.

¹³⁶ This is the Haftorah reading for Shabbat Shekalim.

¹³⁷ These are the same words that Elisha used for Elijah, compare 2 Kings 2:12 with 2 Kings 13:14.

by his sixteen year old son, Azariahu (AKA Azariah and Uziah). Yeravam does evil in the eyes of God (surprise!¹³⁸), but God allows him to restore the Israelite frontier to the borders of David and Solomon (see 1 Kings 8:65 and 2 Kings 14:25), because God saw the suffering of the people of Israel.¹³⁹ We are told (II Kings 14:25) that this is as prophesied by “Yonah (Jonah) son of Amitay the prophet,” who seemingly is the same Yonah son of Amitay from the whale story¹⁴⁰. Azariahu, on the other hand, does right in God’s eyes except not removing the shrines.¹⁴¹ God strikes him with leprosy¹⁴², and so he lives much of his life in quarantine, while his son Yotam ran the government, and then succeeded Azariahu as King. Zechariah son of Yeravam becomes King in the Northern Kingdom. He does evil in God’s eyes. He is assassinated by and succeed by Shalum son of Yavesh. This fulfills God’s promise to Yehu that four generations of his progeny would sit on the throne of Israel (2 Kings 15:19, referencing 2 Kings 10:30)¹⁴³, Yehoachaz, Yehoash Yeravam, Zecharia. Shalum reigns for 30 days, before he is attacked by Menachem son of Gadi who then

¹³⁸ In this section, we are told about each Northern King: “King X did evil in the eyes of God, and followed the path of Yeravam son of Nevat who caused Israel to sin, and did not depart from it (the evil path). This is said (with slight variations) regarding Yehu (2 Kings 10:31), Yehoachaz (13:2), Yehoash (13:11), Yeravam son of Yoash (14:24), Zechariah son of Yeravam (15:9), Menachem ben Gadi (15:18), Pekachyahu ben Menachem (15:24), Pekach ben Remaliah (15:28), and finally about the “Children of Israel” (17:22). Recall that Yeravam was the first King of the Northern tribes, who also started the Northern cult practice. For Yeravam’s life, see 1 Kings 11-14. The phrase “who caused Israel to sin” indicates that on a certain level, the Yeravam is blamed more than the people for the idolatry. Perhaps 17:21-22 shows that the blame finally sinks into the people themselves. “For Israel broke away from the House of David, and made Yeravam ben Nevat King, and Yeravam pushed Israel away from God, and caused them to sin a great sin. And the Children of Israel followed after all the sins of Yeravam that they did, they did not depart from them.”

¹³⁹ Note that historically, this was a period of decline in Assyria’s control over West Asia (JPS Haftorah Commentary, overview of “Amos”).

¹⁴⁰ See below p. 142.

¹⁴¹ During this section of the story, we are generally told about the Kings of Judah that they “Did good in the eyes of God, but they (i.e. the people) did not remove the shrines, the people would still sacrifice and bring incense on the shrines.” This phrase is said regarding Yehoash (2 Kings 12:3-4), Amotsiyahu (14:3-4), Azariah (15:3-4), and Yotam (15:34-35). A similar report is given of Chizkiyah, except that he actually does remove the shrines (18:3-4). The story of Chizkiyah’s destroying the shrines includes him destroying many objects of idolatry, indicating that these shrines were not dedicated to worship of God. Perhaps the merit of the Kings in Judea was that they themselves did not take part in this practice (compare the description of King Achaz of Judea in 2 Kings 16). Also interesting is that when we are told that the shrines weren’t removed, the word is used for removal is “רָסַת” which is the same word used to tell us that the Northern Kings did not stray (“רָסַת”).

¹⁴² Per 2 Chronicles 26:16-21, this was because he went into the Temple and offered incense, despite the priests telling him that this rite could only be done by priests.”

¹⁴³ Yehu was succeeded by Yehoachaz, who was succeed by his son, Yehoash who was succeed by his son Yeravam, who was succeed by his son Zecharia.

takes over. Menachem also does evil in God's eyes. He pays a tribute to King Pul of Assyria, who had invaded the land. Much of the remainder of Chapter 15 is stories of kings of the Northern Kingdom who are overthrown, and Assyria beginning to take Northern Kingdom territory and exile its inhabitants to Assyria. Back in Judah, Yotam son of Uziah is King, doing right in God's eyes (but not removing the shrines). Aram and Pekach ben Remaliah (King of the Northern Kingdom) begin to attack Judah. Chapter 16 tells us of Achaz son of Yotam, King of Judah. He did not do right in God's eyes, instead going "in the path of the Kings of Israel," even "passing his son through fire, as the abomination of the nations whom God dispossessed before the Israelites"¹⁴⁴ and sacrificing on shrines. He is attacked by King Rezin of Aram and King Pekach son of Remaliah of Israel (an attack we already mentioned above). They besiege him in Jerusalem, but cannot defeat him. He allies with King Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria (sending him tribute), who attacks Aram, killing King Rezin and capturing Damascus.

- Chapter 17 tells of the final downfall of Israel (i.e. the Northern Kingdom). Hoshea son of Elah is the King of Israel (having revolted against Pekach ben Remalyahu in 15:30). He does evil in God's eyes, but not like the previous Kings of Israel.¹⁴⁵ Shalmaneser of Assyria makes Hoshea a vassal.¹⁴⁶ Hoshea pays tribute to Assyria, but one year he sent envoys to King So of Egypt¹⁴⁷ and does not pay tribute to Assyria. "The Kind of Syria"¹⁴⁸ imprisons Hoshea and besieged Samaria (what was left of the Northern Kingdom) for three years. Samaria is captured, and the Israelites are deported to and settled in a number of places in Assyria. 17:7-41 retells the

¹⁴⁴ 2 Kings 16:3. See Lev. 18:21 and 20:2-4, which speak of giving one's child to Molech, and Deut. 18:9-14 ". . . There shall not be found among you one who passes his son or daughter in fire . . . For all who do so are an abomination to God, and because of these abominations Adonay your God is dispossessing them . . ." For more information on this practice, see "Moloch, Cult of" in Encyclopedia Judaica. Some of the mentions of this practice in prophetic works (Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5; Ezekiel 16:21; 20:31; 23:37, 39; Isaiah 57:5 and Psalms 106:37-38) indicate that this ritual is one of actual sacrifice. However, Weinfeld concludes, "the fact that the legal-historical, in contrast to the prophetic/poetic, sources do not mention real burning should serve as a warning against a hasty identification of Moloch with human sacrifice."

¹⁴⁵ We are not told what distinguishes him. Encyclopedia Judaica "Hoshea" suggests he probably got rid of the golden calf of Beth-El (see 1 Kings 12:29). Rabbinic legend has it that he removed the guards that Yeravam had placed on the path to Jerusalem, to stop people from the North going to the Temple in Jerusalem.

¹⁴⁶ 2 Kings 17:3 says "Upon him rose up Shalmaneser, and Hoshea was a vassel to him, and would send him a tribute." An account of this relationship is also found in an inscription copied in James B. Prichard's, Ancient Near East Texts (text 284). "[as for Menachem I over]whelmed him . . . I returned him to his place [and imposed tribute upon him] . . . They overthrew their king Pekach and I placed Hoshea as king over them . . ."

¹⁴⁷ Encyclopedia Judaica "Hoshea" suggests that this was part of a planned revolt against Assyria. Prichard's Ancient Near East Texts text 284) has an inscription of Sargon II saying: "I besieged and Conquered Samaria . . . led away as booty 27,290 inhabitants of it . . . Hanno, king of Gaza and also Sib'e, the turtan of Egypt set out from Rapihu against me . . . I defeated them."

¹⁴⁸ I think this is Sargon II.

history of Israel, its sinning before God, and that the destruction of the Northern Kingdom resulted from the Israelite failure to follow God's law. It also speaks about God warning the Israelites through their prophets. This is particularly interesting, because the rest of the Book of Kings is fairly limited in the references to prophets.

- The Kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 18-25:21)
 - Chizkiyahu's Reign (2 Kings 18:1-20:21): Chizkiyahu (Hezekiah) is perhaps the most laudable Jewish King in the Bible. He does right in Gods eyes, and even removes the shrines and other forms of idolatry from the land (see footnote 141 above). "In *Adonay*, the God of Israel he trusted, and after him there were none like him amongst the Kings of Judah, nor those who came before him." (18:5) God was with him. "He rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him." (18:7) Chapters 18 & 19 concentrates on a siege by Sancherev, king of Assyria on Jerusalem. Rav Shakay (Sancherev's General) calls to the people of Jerusalem to surrender, telling them not to believe Chizkiyahu when he tells them that God will save them. After all, he says, where were the gods of the other countries when they were defeated by Assyria. Chizkiyahu sends messengers to consult with the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah says that God will delude Rav Shakay, who will hear a rumor and return to Assyria and die by the sword there. Sancherev sends a written message telling Chizkiyahu that he will be defeated¹⁴⁹. Chizkiyahu takes the letter to the Temple, spreads it out before God, and prays for God's help. Among his more eloquent words are, "Turn your ear, oh Lord, and hear, open your eyes, Lord, and see." (2 Kings 19:16), words which are often used in our prayerbooks. 19:20-34 is a prophecy from Isaiah to Chizkiyahu concerning Assyria. God sends a plague that kills 185,000 Assyrian troops, and Assyria retreats. Chapter 20 tells us that Chizkiyahu got sick, and that Isaiah came to tell him (per God's instructions) that he will pass away. Chizkiyahu begins to cry and prays, "Please, God, remember that I walked before you faithfully and with full heart; what was good in your eyes I did." (20:3) Before Isaiah leaves, he receives another prophecy saying that Chizkiyahu will be healed. Chapter 20 tells of a visit by the King of Babylonia. At the end of Chapter 20 Isaiah prophesizes to Chizkiyahu that his progeny will be defeated, that Judea's treasures will be taken to Babylonia, and that his progeny will serve as eunuchs in the Babylonian palace. Chizkiyahu takes this as a good prediction, as it indicates that the land will remain secure during Chizkiyah's lifetime. At the end of Chapter 20, Chizkiyahu passes away and is succeeded by his son Menasheh.
 - King Menasheh (2 Kings 21): King Menasheh does evil in God's eyes "as the abominations of the nations whom God had dispossessed before the Children of Israel" (21:2). He restores the shrines and idolatry which Chizkiyahu had destroyed, including building alters to idolatry in the Temple, passing his children through fire, engaging in necromancy, murder, etc. God sends word through the prophets of impending wanton destruction of Judea. Amon succeeds his father Menasheh upon the latter's death, and continues in his father's ways. His courtiers assassinate him, but the people kill the conspirators and install Amon's son Yoshiyahu (Josiah) as king.

¹⁴⁹ It is not clear if this is a separate attack by Sancherev, or the same one.

- King Yoshiyahu (2 Kings 22-23:30): Josiah does right in God's eyes. He begins a project of restoration on the Temple, during which a "scroll of Torah" is found. King Yoshiyahu is concerned because, obviously, people have not been observing the content of this recently found scroll of law, and seemingly because it predicts evil to those who do not follow the law.¹⁵⁰ Yoshiyahu sends Chilkiah the Priest and some others to "seek out God" on behalf of himself and a people. Chilkiah and his group consult Chuldah the prophetess, who says that destruction will come to Judea in accordance with what the scroll says. This is because the people abandoned God. But that the destruction would come only after Yoshiyahu's time. Yoshiyahu gathers the people to read them the law, and to solemnize a covenant between them and God. Yoshiyahu has all idolatry removed from the Temple and destroyed. He also has the people observe Passover in accordance with the scroll, "A Passover like that had not been done since the days of the Judges who judged Israel and for all the days of the Kings of Israel and Judah" (2 Kings 23:22). However, God's great wrath did not turn away from the people for all that King Menasheh had done (23:26) and destruction is still predicted. Yoshiyahu is killed by Pharaoh Necho in a battle between Egypt and Assyria.
- The fall of Judah (2 Kings 23:31-25:21): Yoshiyahu is succeeded by his son, Yehoachaz, who does evil in God's eyes. He is imprisoned and later executed by Pharaoh Necho, who places Eliyakim son of Yoshiyahu in his place (Naming him Yehoyakim), and imposes a tax on Israel. Eliyakim also does evil in God's eyes. During his time, Nevuchadnezar becomes king of Babylonia, and Eliyakim is his vassal for three years. Judah is subject to raids from a plethora of peoples.¹⁵¹ We are told that this evil befalls because of King Menasheh's sins, that God would not forgive.¹⁵² Yehoyakim is succeeded by his son Yehoyachin. Egypt's power has waned as Babylonia had captured all their land from the Wadi of Egypt towards Babylonia.¹⁵³ This means Jerusalem is now under the Babylonian sphere rather than Egypt having any say. Nevuchadnezar besieges Jerusalem, and Yehoyachin and his officers surrender to Nevuchadnezar. Nevuchadnezar also takes all the treasure from Jerusalem, and exiles soldiers, craftsmen, etc., leaving only the poor in Jerusalem.¹⁵⁴ Nevuchadnezar appoints Yeyoachin's uncle, Matanyah as king, changing Matanyah's name to Tzidkiyah (Zedekiah). Tzidkiyah of course does evil in God's eyes. He also rebels against Nevuchadnezar¹⁵⁵. Nevuchadnezar besieges the city again. The city walls are breached. Tzidkiyah and his family try to escape, but are caught (and

¹⁵⁰ Based on the information about this scroll in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, scholars believe the content of this scroll was likely associated with some of the content in Deuteronomy.

¹⁵¹ Chaldeans, Arameans, Moabites, and Amonites.

¹⁵² Effectively, punishment was due for Menasheh's misdeeds. It seems that Yoshiyahu's good deeds merely delayed this punishment.

¹⁵³ The major defeat of Egypt is also mentioned on Jeremiah 46:2.

¹⁵⁴ This exile, which occurred in 597 BCE is referred to as "*Galut Yehohachin* – the Exile of Yehoyachin."

¹⁵⁵ The indication from Ezekiel 17:16-21 and Ezekiel 29, amongst other places, is that a conspiracy with Egypt was involved in this revolt. See further Encyclopedia Judaica "Zedekiah."

treated none too kindly). Nevuchadnezar has Jerusalem and the Temple destroyed and plundered. Those who were still in Jerusalem were exiled to Babylonia.

- Epilogue (2 Kings 25:22-30): Nevuchadnezar places Gedaliahu in charge of anyone left in Judah. Gedaliahu assures the people that they can stay in the land and serve the King of Babylon, and they will be OK. Gedaliahu and his entourage (consisting of Judeans and Babylonians) are murdered by Ishmael son of Nethaniah son of Elishama, who is of Judean royal descent.¹⁵⁶ We are told at the very end of the book that King Yehoyachin is released from prison by King *Evil¹⁵⁷ Mardoch* and he lives out his life under the care of the King.

SOME THEMES AND THOUGHTS ON THE BOOK OF KINGS:

Though the book of Kings is largely a book of history, it views history from a religious perspective. Everything that happens is willed by God, based on the positive or negative actions of the people and their Kings. An important theme is God's ability to change God's mind, conditioned on changed behavior of the people. For instance, God promises David a permanent dynasty, but this is conditioned on the loyalty of his progeny to the service of God.

¹⁵⁶ For more details on Gedaliah and his demise, see Jeremiah 40:7–43:7. The date of Gedaliah's assassination is commemorated to today in *Tzom Gedalilah* ("The Fast of Gedaliah") which is observed on the day after Rosh Hashanah.

¹⁵⁷ "Evil" is a transliteration, not a translation.

The Latter Prophets

The Books of Joshua through Kings are often referred to as the *Nevi'im Rishonim*, or “Former Prophets.” We now enter the set of works known as the *Nevi'im Acharonim*, or “Latter prophets.” These are less historical, and tend to tell us about the works and sermons/prophecies of the particular prophet. As a general rule, these prophecies begin with predictions of doom destruction and exile, and end with a note of hope that a righteous remnant will survive and rebuild.

1) Isaiah

For further background into Isaiah, see “Overview of Biblical Books” found in the JPS Bible Commentary Book on Haftorahs, and the Encyclopedia Judaica article on Isaiah.

We already met Isaiah in Kings, as a prophet to King Chizkiyahu.¹⁵⁸ He was a prophet during the mid-8th century BCE. Many scholars believe that the first 39 chapters of Isaiah tell us of the works of Isaiah, while chapters 40-66 tell us of the works of a later prophet, who was alive during the Babylonian exile. We will discuss those chapters separately.

The Book of Isaiah spends little time on matters of politics, and much more time on decrying the moral depravity of the Jewish people, particularly with regard to their lack of care for the less fortunate. In Encyclopedia Judaica, Theodore Friedman identifies these main themes of Isaiah’s prophecies:

- Emphasis of God’s Holiness;
- The rejection of human wisdom to guide Israel, in favor of reliance on God;
- Jerusalem as the city of God which would become the universal place of worship of the God of Israel by all nations¹⁵⁹;
- The delineation of a messianic king who would bring peace and justice.
- The idea that only a small remnant of Israel would survive the doom brought upon Israel for its sins.
- Emphasis of morality within religion, and that a religion without morality is an abomination.

Here is an outline of Isaiah 1-39

- Chapter 1 Isaiah preaches against the people of Judah and Jerusalem¹⁶⁰, who have “Forsaken the Lord,” (1:4) comparing them to those of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 9-10). God despises the people’s religious practices (“What do I need with all your sacrifices,”

¹⁵⁸ See above on II Kings 18 and following, beginning on page 69.

¹⁵⁹ The idea of all nations worshipping God at the Temple in Jerusalem is prominent in a number of prophetic works. See the introductions to Micah, below p. 146, Haggai, below p. 155, and Zechariah, below p. 157. See also Jeremiah Chapter 3, p. 88 footnote 201 and accompanying text.

¹⁶⁰ 1:1-27 makes up *Haftorat Chazon*, the Haftorah which we read the week before *Tisha B’Av*, which commemorates the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

v.11) and prayers (“Although when you pray at length, I do not listen,” v. 15) because the people behave evilly (“Your hands full of blood. Cleanse and be clean . . . Learn good, seek justice, uphold the orphan and defend the widow.” v. 15-17). Improving their ways will absolve the Jewish people of their sins and lead them to good fortune (v. 18), but disobedience will be punished. After great destruction, God will “return your judges as of old, and their advisors as of yore,¹⁶¹” after which Jerusalem will be known as “City of righteousness, faithful place.” The chapter closes with more prediction of doom.

- Chapter 2-5 opens by predicting a future where the Temple will “stand firm.” It will be a place to which all nations will come to worship. “And they will beat swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not raise a sword against a nation, and they will no longer know war.”¹⁶² Then Isaiah decries the current depravity of the people, who have forsaken God and adopted the religious practices of others. They have become rich and opulent (see particularly 2:7, 3:16-23) but will be humbled (“Instead of perfume there will be rot . . . ” 3:24) and suffer military defeat (3:25). Only the righteous will be left (“Those who remain in Zion, those who are left over in Jerusalem will be called holy, all those who are inscribed for life in Jerusalem. These themes continue through Chapter 5. Chapter 5 includes the metaphor of a person who plants a vineyard hoping for grapes, but instead got inferior grapes. “For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel, and the men of Judah are the seedlings of his love, and God hoped for justice, and behold injustice, [God hoped for] righteousness, and behold, iniquity.” (5:7).
- Chapter 6 is a famed vision of Isaiah of God on God’s throne surrounded by the Seraphim (a form of angel), each calling to each other “Holy, Holy, Holy is the lord of Hosts, the whole earth is filled with His glory.”¹⁶³ God (rhetorically?) asks Isaiah not have the people not listen, so God can bring them punishment, “Lest their eyes see, ears hear, and heart understand, and it repent and be healed.”¹⁶⁴ Isaiah is told that there will be utter destruction, leaving only a tenth of the people alive in its wake.
- Chapter 7-9 tells us of the unsuccessful attack of King Rezin of Aram and King Pekach ben Remaliah of Israel on Achaz ben Yotam, king of Judah. We learned about this attack in Chapters 15 and 16 of 2 Kings where we were told that Achaz contacted King Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria (sending him tribute), who attacks Aram, killing King Rezin and captures Damascus.¹⁶⁵ Isaiah is told to go to speak to Achaz and tell him not to fear their attack. During the conversation with Achaz, Isaiah says, “Is it not enough that you treat humans as helpless, that you also treat my God as helpless” (7:13, trans per JPS), seemingly a complaint that Achaz looked to Assyria for help, although Assyria isn’t

¹⁶¹ This phrase is used for the beginning of the 11th blessing in the weekday Amidah, “Restore our judges as of old, our advisors as of yore.”

¹⁶² Note that Isaiah 2:2-4 is almost exactly the same words as Micah 4:1-3. Either one text copied from the other, or both texts copied from some other source.

¹⁶³ 6:3. This verse is one of the mainstays of the Kedusha recited during the repetition of the Amidah. See “Additions to the Repetition of the Amidah (Kedushah, Rabbi’s Modim, Priestly Blessing)” p. 23

¹⁶⁴ Alternatively, these verses (6:9-10) may be renderd as God telling Isaiah to speak to the people even though they will not understand.

¹⁶⁵ See above, p. 68.

mentioned for another couple of verses. God says that the King of Assyria will destroy those attacking Judah. A similar message comes from the beginning of Chapter 8, where Isaiah is told to write the words “Pillage hastens, looting speeds” (8:1, trans per. JPS) and also to name his son that. This carries a similar message of the defeat Pekach & Rezin. This defeat is to be a result of God being on Judah’s side - “Come up with an idea, and it will be uprooted, speak of things and they shall not come to pass, for God is with us” (8:10). Isaiah warns the people that turning to ghosts and spirits for help would have disastrous results. Chapter 9 predicts wanton destruction of the Northern Kingdom, but a light at the end of the tunnel whereby a Davidic kingdom will reign and be lead by an ideal king. “For a child is born to us, a son is given to us, and authority shall rest on his shoulders, and his name shall be called ‘Wonderful in counsel is the mighty God, Eternal Father, Master of Peace’” (9:15).¹⁶⁶ While predicting disaster after disaster, the text develops a refrain, “With all this, his (God’s) anger is not turned back, and his hand is still outstretched,” (9:11, 9:16, 9:21, 10:4).

- Chapter 10 returns to a moralistic message, referring at the beginning to those who pervert justice in order to hurt the cause of the poor, and cheat the downtrodden. Assyria is “the rod of my anger” (10:5). Assyria is an evil nation, but is a tool for God’s punishment. When all is said and done, Assyria will get its just deserts (10:12).¹⁶⁷ They have given themselves credit for their grandeur, which is like an ax taking credit for the wood it cuts (10:15). “On that day, the remainder of Israel and vestige of Jacob will no longer lean on its attacker¹⁶⁸, but shall lean on God, the Holy of Israel faithfully” (10:20).
- Chapter 11-12 is a messianic message with spectacular imagery. It tells us that a shoot will come out of the House of Jesse (i.e. David’s father) and will flower. “The spirit of God will rest upon him, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and greatness, a spirit of knowledge and awe of God” (11:2). He will rule in justice, not by appearance, judging the poor fairly. “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie with the kid, the calf, young lion and fatling, and a small child herding them” (11:6). “They will not do evil or base things in all of my Holy Mountain, for the whole land will be filled with knowledge of God, just as water covers the sea” (11:9) God will bring back the dispersed of Israel. God will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather

¹⁶⁶ This translation, though my own, is based on Hertz. Alternative translations are along the lines of “and his name shall be called wonderful, advisor, mighty god, eternal father, master of peace.” This verse is taken by Christians to refer to Jesus (though even accepting how they parse the text, the word for “god” could also be translated “mighty” or the like). Still others understand the “Mighty God” referred to in the verse as being the one who names the child.

¹⁶⁷ There is a recurring concept in the Bible that God uses evil empires as tools of God’s destruction of other evildoers. See also Ezekiel 21, below at p. 114 and the introduction to Habakuk, below at p. 151. In fact, Deuteronomy sees the Israelite conquest of Canaan as a tool of God’s punishment for evildoers, “Do not speak in your heart when God destroys them from before you, ‘Because of my righteousness the LORD brought me to inherit this land,’ – it is because of the evil of these nations the LORD dispossesses them (of the land) before you.” (Deut 9:4).

¹⁶⁸ This is another reference to Achaz’s reliance on Assyria (see 7:13).

the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the Earth.¹⁶⁹ Ephraim (i.e. the Northern Kingdom) will not envy Judah, and Judah will not harass Ephraim. God will dry up the Egyptian sea, and dry up the Euphrates so that the people could return to Israel through dry land, as the red sea was parted when the Israelites left Egypt. Chapter 12 pictures the people singing God's praises: "Behold, God is my salvation, I shall be certain and not fear, because the Lord God is my strength and my song." (12:2). "And you shall joyfully draw water from the fountains of salvation" (12:3). Isaiah closes: "Shout and celebrate, dwellers of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy of Israel" (12:6).

- Chapters 13 through 27 present a collection of Isaiah's prophecies of doom toward foreign nations. Most of these prophecies begin with the words "The <nation> pronouncement" e.g. 13:1 "Babylonia Pronouncement," 15:1 "Moab Pronouncements," etc. Chapter 13-14:27 predicts the destruction of Babylonia. It pictures people amassing for war as the Babylonians come as "God with his weapons of wrath, to destroy the Earth" (13:5). "The day of the LORD¹⁷⁰ is coming . . . to make the earth desolate and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the sky and the constellations will not give their light, the sun shall be dark when it rises, and the moon will not radiate its light" (13:9-10). This is punishment for peoples' evil and arrogance (13:11). Chapter 14 speaks of God again choosing Israel and returning them to their land, and the oracle to be recited in regard to Babylon's destruction. The Earth will cheer Babylon's destruction (14:7-8), and the netherworld will stir (14:9-11). A nation that thought it would reach the sky would drop to the netherworld (14:12-20). 14:28-32 is a brief prophecy towards Philistia given during the year of Achaz's death. 15-16:14 is a prophecy against Moav. In Chapter 16 advises Moav to send a message (or something else, perhaps a tribute) to Zion. 16:4 speaks of refugees taking asylum, but it is not clear if this is telling Moav to take in Israelites when they need asylum, or vice-versa (JPS translates "Let Moab's outcasts find asylum in you," but many commentators (e.g. Rashi) take the outcasts to be Israelites that are fleeing. 16:5 gives hope for a future messianic age (justifying either why Moav should seek refuge in Judah, or why the should offer refuge), "A throne shall be established in kindness, and shall be sat upon in faithfulness in the tent of David, judging, seeking justice, and zealous for righteousness." Little is said about Moav's iniquities, though they are described as haughty in 17:6. The prophet is sympathetic to Moav's plight "Therefore my bowels moan as a lyre for Moav, and my insides for Kir Charash" (16:11). 17:1-17:11 is the "Damascus Pronouncement," predicting doom to Damascus and Israelites alike. There will be great desolation. "In that day man will turn to his maker, and his eyes will see to the Holy of Israel. And (man) will no longer turn to the

¹⁶⁹ The use of the names "Judah" and "Israel" here is probably purposeful to demonstrate an ingathering that includes the survivors of both kingdoms.

¹⁷⁰ "The Day of the Lord" is a theme found in a number of prophets (E.J. "The Day of the Lord" lists Isa. 13:6-13; Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:4; 4:14 (Joel is discussed below starting at p. 133); Amos 5:18-20 (discussed below p. 139, text accompanying footnote 395); Obad. 15 (discussed below p. 142, text accompanying footnote 404); Zeph. 1:17-18 (discussed below p. 150, text accompanying footnote 450); Mal. 3:23). Also closely related are the final chapters of Zecharia (see introduction to Zecharia and discussions of the last chapters of Zecharia, beginning below at p. 157). These passages refer to a dramatic doom where the evildoers of the world are destroyed, and the righteous left to flourish in the future.

altars of his hands making, and that which his fingers made he will not see, nor to the sacred trees nor to the sun pillar (17:7-8). 17:12-18:7 diverges from the litany of pronouncements, giving a pronouncement marked by the word “Ah!” (17:12, 18:1). We are told that peoples are chased away by seemingly fearsome despoilers, who quickly enough shall be no more. Chapter 18 speaks of a powerful nation, far away. But God is secure and confident (18:4) and eventually tribute will go to God abiding on Mount Zion (18:7). Chapter 19-20 is the “Egypt Pronouncement,” and another prophecy about Egypt, predicting civil war (at that time Egypt had several regions with their own kings) and then a harsh master being placed on Egypt. At the time of Egypt’s destruction, there will be people swearing loyalty to God, and altars will be built to God in Egypt. The Egyptians and Syrians will make peace, and they will all worship God. “In that day, Israel will be a third to Egypt and Assyria, as a blessing on Earth. For the Lord of Hosts will bless them saying, ‘Blessed is my nation, Egypt, my handiwork, Assyria, and my inheritance, Israel.’” (19:24-25) Chapter 21-23 continues with a series of pronouncements to many nations.

- Chapters 24-27 describes the destruction of many nations and a new era of hope. God will strip the earth, and both mighty and weak will be equally destitute. “For the earth was defiled by its inhabitants, for they transgressed teachings and violated rules, they uprooted an everlasting covenant” (24:5). New wine (a symbol of prosperity and celebration) languishes, those who were merry sigh . . . Chapter 25 begins with a prayer “Oh Lord, my God, you I shall exalt, I will praise your name, for you have done wonders . . . for you have made a city a stone heap, a walled town into ruin . . .” For this reason fierce people must fear God, because God protects those who are weak and in need. “[God] will swallow death forever, and the Lord God will erase tears from upon all faces, and the reproach of his nation he will remove from the land, for the Lord has spoken. On that day it will be said, “Behold, this is our God, we hoped for him and he saved us, this is the God for about we hoped, we will rejoice and celebrate in his salvation” (25:8-9). Chapter 26 tells us “On that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah, we have a strong city . . . Open the gates that a righteous nation may enter, who keeps the faith” (26:1-2). “Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord-God is the rock of all ages (26:4). Chapter 27 tells us that on “that day” God will defeat the mighty, the evil serpent Leviathan. We are told “In the future, Jacob shall take root, and Israel will blossom . . .” (27:6). Chapter 27 closes with a vision of ingathering of the refugees of Israel, “And in that day, the Lord will beat out [the people like grain] from the channel of the Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt; and you shall be picked up one by one, O children of Israel! And in that day, a great ram’s horn shall be sounded and the strayed who are in the land of Assyria and the expelled who are in the land of Egypt shall come and worship the Lord on the holy mount, in Jerusalem” (27:12-13, trans JPS).
- Chapters 28-33 are prophecies beginning with the word “Ah”¹⁷¹ and have as a background Judah’s attempt to ally with Egypt in a revolt against Assyrian power (the exact historical context is unclear, per EJ, either the revolt in 713–712 against Sargon or that of 705–701 against Sennacherib. Chapter 28 depicts the people as drunk and confused “Even these are muddled by wine, and confused by liquor, the priest and the prophet . . .” (28:7). The people say they have made a covenant with death” (28:14) and that “the flood will pass

¹⁷¹ The use of the word “Ah,” suggests that parts of Chapter 17 and 18 are related to this section.

and will not contact us, for we have taken shelter in treachery, and covered ourselves with lies.” (28:15). However, they will not escape the destruction. Chapter 29 addresses Jerusalem (calling Jerusalem “Ariel” – my God is a lion) predicting an oppressing siege that would end in an instant. The prophet speaks of a people who are in a deep slumber, not able to understand God’s word, “. . . Because the nation has approached [me] with its mouth, and has honored me with its lips, but has distanced its heart from me, and made its service of me into the command of humans and of wrote, therefore I will continue to befuddle this nation . . . ” (29:13-14). Destruction is coming, but “on that day, the deaf shall hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind will see through dark and clouds. The humble will have more joy in God, and the destitute will be rejoice in the Holy of Israel. For the tyrant shall be gone, and the one who scoffs shall be destroyed, and those who are diligent with evil shall be destroyed.” (29:18-20). Chapter 30 describes Judah as “disloyal sons” making plans against God’s will and seeking refuge from Pharaoh without consulting God. The alliance will result not in strength and benefit, but in shame. The people are described as refusing to hear God’s instruction, seeking falsehoods instead. The people had been told that their victory would come through stillness and quiet, but instead they put confidence in the tools of war. However, God is ready to come to the peoples’ aid when they seek it, “Truly, the Lord will wait to show you grace; truly (God) will rise to show you mercy, for the Lord is a God of justice, fortunate are those that wait for him. For, nation of Zion who dwells in Jerusalem, cry not, [God] will be graceful to the voice of your shouts, (God) will answer when he hears it. Chapter 31 again talks explicitly of those going to Egypt for help, again criticizing them for relying on horses, rather than on God. “Egypt is man and not God, their horses flesh and not spirit, the Lord will stretch his arm and the helper shall stumble, and the helped shall fall, and they shall be destroyed together.” (31:3) The people should return to God and away from their idols, and Assyria will fall, but not by human sword. Chapter 32 speaks of a king reigning in righteousness, and eyes and ears being (metaphorically) opened. The haughty and the confident will be cut down, and the people will dwell in peace. Chapter 33 predicts destruction to the perpetrators of evil, and success for those who do right. Jerusalem will become great and secure, “For the Lord will be our judge, the Lord will be our ruler, the Lord will be our king, he will deliver us.” (33:22).

- Chapters 34-35 are considered a separate literary unit. Chapter 34 predicts God’s wrath on the world, and particularly on Edom. Chapter 35 concerns the redemption of the Jewish people and their return to Zion. There is significant debate as to where these chapters fit in historically or literarily (or even if the two chapters are part of the same unit).
- Chapters 36-39 are historical, telling of some stories of Isaiah’s involvement in public affairs. They largely parallel 2 Kings 18:13-20:19 (which we didn’t describe in as great a length above)¹⁷².

¹⁷² It is always interesting to study the nuanced differences between parallel stories (an exercise we will not do at length). Also, it is interesting to discuss what the “source” of this story. Is there a common source that was dropped into both places? Was the text originally in one of these books, and then copied into the other . . .

- Like 2 Kings, Chapters 36-37 tells two stories of siege/invasion of Sancherev.¹⁷³ Chapter 36 begins by telling us that Sancherev of Assyria besieged all fortified towns in Judah. He dispatched Rav Shakay to Jerusalem. Ministers come out from Jerusalem and Rav Shakay. Rav Shakay's speech is almost verbatim the same speech as in 2 Kings, asking upon whom Judah is relying. He argues that Egypt will not come to their aid, and that God will not help since Chizkiyahu had destroyed the religious shrines¹⁷⁴. The ministers from Judah ask that Rav Shakay speak in Aramaic, so that onlookers don't understand what he is saying, but Rav Shakay calls out to the people telling them that Chizkiyahu can not save them, and they should give up, and will receive a pleasant exile. Chizkiyahu sends messengers to Isaiah, asking him to pray on their behalf. Isaiah tells Chizkiyahu not to worry, and that God will delude Rav Shakay, who will return home and fall by his own sword. Rav Shakay does hear that Sancherev is fighting in Lachish, and Rav Shakay turns to join that battle. Sancherev sends a letter to Isaiah telling him not to rely on God, arguing that God did not save all the other kings whom Sancherev had defeated. Chizkiyahu spreads out the letter before God, and prays to God (particularly noting that Sancherev's words are blasphemous). Isaiah sends a message to Chizkiyahu with God's response to Chizkiyahu's prayer (again, almost verbatim from 2 Kings). That night, an angel comes into Sancherev's camp and kills 185,000 soldiers. Sancherev returns to Nineveh.
- Chapter 38 tells the story of Chizkiyahu's falling sick and being told by Isaiah that God has said he will die. Chizkiyahu prays to God, who sends Isaiah back to say that God has accepted his Chizkiyahu's prayer, and that he will have another 15 years of life, and that he will be saved from the King of Assyria. 38:9-20 is a prayer of Chizkiyahu upon his recovery, which does not appear in 2 Kings.
- Chapter 39 tells of a visit from the King of Babylonia to Chizkiyahu and Isaiah's prediction that eventually Babylonia would plunder Jerusalem (but after Chizkiyahu's death) defeat Judah and despoil the palace. Chizkiyahu is pleased with the report, as it implies that everything will remain secure during his lifetime.

Isaiah 40-66

The widely held belief is that chapters 40-66 are written around the year 540 BCE, as the Babylonian Empire which had exiled the Jewish people was near collapse. We will discuss them further after reviewing Chapters 1-39. Medieval Rabbis such as Ibn Ezra were already sensitive to the idea that these chapters represented a separate literary unit formulated around this time (see e.g. Ibn Ezra on 40:1 and 49:7). The "Overview of Biblical Books" found in the JPS Bible Commentary on Haftorahs highlights some of the important arguments for understanding the Book of Isaiah in this way:

1. The earlier parts of Isaiah refer to King Achaz and Chizkiyahu (743-727 BCE and 727-698 BCE), whereas 45:1 refers to Cyrus of Mede, who conquered Babylonia in 539 BCE.

¹⁷³ It is not clear whether these are the same invasion, or represent two separate situations.

¹⁷⁴ Recall per 2 Kings that Chizkiyahu's destruction of the shrines was sited to his great credit.

2. Early parts of Isaiah describe Assyria as the rod of God's wrath, whereas no mention of Assyria is to be found in the latter sections, and Cyrus is described as anointed by God to free God's people, while mentioning the dwindling power of Babylon.
3. Earlier chapters have some parallels to Assyrian historical documents, whereas chapters 40 on have links to Babylonian and Persian inscriptions.
4. Isaiah 6 presupposes the existence of a Temple in Jerusalem, whereas Isaiah 60 speaks of its reconstruction.
5. God speaks to God's prophets about restoration in the latter chapters, which (per Ibn Ezra) would have made little sense to prophets in the 8th Century BCE.

Some major themes of Isaiah 40-66 are (mostly culled from JPS):

- A universalistic ideal, seeing all people come to worship God.
- God as unique, transcendent, and wise beyond measure.
- The uniqueness of the people of Israel, particularly as a model and inspiration for other nations ("A light unto to the nations").
- Consolation of the people and prophecy of a hopeful future. Interestingly, as pointed out in the JPS Haftorah Commentary on 40:2, the hopeful future is God's unilateral decision, for God's own glory. Nothing is said about Israel's repentance.
- Polemics against idolatry. Interestingly, for the first time in the Bible non-Israelites are criticized for their idolatry. Absolute monotheism.
- Imagery of light.
- Towards the end there is a shift from concentration on Israel in general to concentrating on a righteous remnant characterized by being spiritually downtrodden, pursuing justice, and seeking the Lord. In many ways, this reflects one of the themes of the first part of Isaiah – general destruction with a righteous remnant left behind to enjoy a better world.

Encyclopedia Judaica ("Isaiah") offers some insight on Isaiah coming together as a book, seemingly of the prophecies of Isaiah son of Amoz. Most importantly, it allowed the book of Isaiah to end on a note of comfort. Further, there are some similarities in language and style (I might add that some of the messages are quite similar). Finally, the editors faith in the ability of prophets to envision the future reduced the historical tension in combining these chapters.

Here is an outline of Isaiah 40-66 (based largely on JPS. The divisions are admittedly oversimplified):

- Chapters 40-48: Prophecies of comfort and redemption.
 - Chapter 40, most famed for its opening words "Nachamu, Nachamu Ami." The first 26 verses are read as the Haftorah on the Shabbat after *Tisha B'av*, wherein we commemorate the destruction of the *Beit Mikdash*.¹⁷⁵ Here, God is asking someone (likely the prophets) to bring comfort to God's people, presumably after the destruction of the *Beit Mikdash* and subsequent exile. The people are to be told that

¹⁷⁵ This Shabbat is generally known as "Shabbat Nachamu," after the first word in this Chapter. On that Shabbat, as well as the next 6 Shabbats, we read "Haftoras of Consolation," which are all taken from Second Isaiah.

they have received more than their deserved punishment¹⁷⁶, and that better times are to come (symbolized by the coming/revelation of God). “Ascend a high mountain, bearer of tidings to Zion; Raise up your voice in strength, bearer of tidings of Jerusalem; Raise up (your voice), do not fear, say to the cities of Judah: ‘Here is your Lord’” (40:9). God is beyond measure and beyond compare, and human nations are insignificant (40:12-26). People should not feel that God is hidden from them (v. 27), “Those who trust in God will have renewed strength, and will grow new limbs as eagles, they shall run and not get weary, walk and not get tired.” (40:31)

- Chapter 41 focuses on God coming to the aid of Israel: “You Israel, are my servant; Jacob whom I chose; seed of Abraham who loved me. Whom I have gathered from the ends of the earth, and called from its corners; and I said to you: You are my servants, I chose you and have not rejected you. Fear not, for I am with you; don’t be frightened, for I am your God, I will strengthen you and help you, even hold you up with my mighty right hand.” (41:8-10).
- Chapter 42 emphasizes Israel’s chosenness and its being a teacher to other nations. “They are my servant, I will uphold . . . He will not dim nor be injured until he places justice on earth and the coastland awaits its teaching.” (42:1, 4). “I, the Lord, called you in righteousness, I held your hand, created you, and made you into a covenant people, a light unto the nations. To open the eyes of the blind, to free the prisoner from jail, from the dungeon those who dwell in darkness.” (42:5-7). God has been silent (i.e. inactive) but will burst onto the scene “screaming as a woman giving birth,” (42:13), helping those in need and destroying those who trusted in idols. Yet at the moment Israel is in a state of destruction, but, “Who gave Jacob over to destruction, and Israel to denigration, was it not the Lord towards whom we sinned . . .” (42:24)
- Chapters 43 and 44 continue to theme of God’s redemption, constantly exhorting the people not to fear. “Now, thus said the Lord, your creator Oh Israel: Fear not for I shall redeem you; I will call you by name; you are mine.” (43:1) “Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your progeny from the East, and gather you from the west.” (43:5). Israel’s iniquities will be expiated for God’s sake (43:25), i.e. because God’s honor is now wrapped up in the honor of Israel, God’s people.
- 45:1-8 is a prophecy to Cyrus¹⁷⁷ who is described as God’s “anointed one . . . whom I have strengthened.” (45:1) God has shown Cyrus favor “For the sake of my servant, Jacob, and Israel my chosen” (45:5).
- The balance of Chapter 45 is furthers the theme of redemption, and exhorting people not to doubt God’s ability to do as predicted. Through all that will happen, God will be recognized as the only power: “Ashamed and disgrace will they all be, together walking in disgrace [will be] those who fashion idols. Israel is victorious through the Lord, an everlasting victory; they will never be ashamed or disgraced.” 45:16-17.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ A similar idea is found in Lamentations 4:22, discussed below at p. 184 footnote 558 and accompanying text.

¹⁷⁷ Cyrus was King of Persia, who defeated Babylonia and allowed Jews to return to Israel and eventually rebuild the *Beit Mikdash*.

¹⁷⁸ The language of this verse is used in *Lecha Dodi* (“Do not be ashamed, do not be disgraced”), the hymn sung on Friday night in *Kabbalat Shabbat*, the receiving of the Sabbath (described

- Chapter 46 speaks of the Babylonian deities being “bowed down,” i.e. defeated (recall that Cyrus of Persia would conquer Babylonia) and of God’s power and uniqueness. “Hearken to me, those of stubborn heart, who are distant from victory. I have brought my victory close, it is not far, and my triumph will not be delayed, I shall put victory in Zion, for Israel my glory.” (46:12-13) Chapter 47 continues to preach towards Babylonia - “go down and sit on dust, maidens of Babylonia, sit on earth without a throne, daughter of Chaldea.” (47:1) God says that God placed “my people” in the hands of Babylonia, but Babylonia showed them no mercy. Even though they may now feel secure, that security will abruptly end.
- Chapter 48 prophesizes to Israel, those “Who swear in the name of the Lord, and invoke the God of Israel, though not with honesty nor sincerity.” (38:1). God had predicted to the future Israel, but their necks were like iron (48:4). Even so, “For the sake of my name I control my wrath, and for my glory I am patient for you, to not destroy you. I have refined you, but not with silver, I test you through the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do [this], for how can I be disgraced, and I shall not place my honor upon another.” (48:9-11 trans per JPS). “Thus said the Lord your redeemer, Holy of Israel, I am the Lord your God; I teach you for your benefit, guide you on the path that you should walk. If only you listened to my commandments, your peace would be like a river, and your victory like waves of the sea. Your progeny would be [numbered] as the sand . . .” (48:18-19).
- Chapters 49-55: Prophecies to Zion regarding reconciliation with God and physical redemption, viewing Zion as a woman or bride.
 - Chapter 49 begins with the words of the prophet, bidding people to listen, and claiming divine appointment from before birth, “God called me in the stomach, and from inside my mother called out my name.¹⁷⁹” (Isaiah 49:1) The prophet has felt that his time has been wasted, but now God has resolved to restore Israel. Zion feels that God has abandoned it, but “Can a woman forget her baby? . . . Your children will quickly come. Those who destroy you and desolate you will be gone from you” (49:15, 17).¹⁸⁰
 - Chapter 50 switches to mode of rebuke: “Thus said the Lord: Where is your mother’s bill of divorce through which I sent her away, and who is the creditor to whom I have sold you, you have been sold through your iniquities, and through your transgressions your mother was sent away (50:1).¹⁸¹ The prophet states that he has followed God’s instructions, and has thus become victim to ridicule and attack. However the prophet is confident in God’s aid.
 - Chapter 51 is a prophecy of hope. Abraham and Sarah were but one when God called, and now are many. God will comfort Zion, making its wilderness like Eden,

above at p.40). In fact, *Lecha Dodi* borrows heavily from this area in Isaiah, as it is as much a messianic song as it is a song about receiving the Sabbath. This is partially because the Sabbath is viewed as having some qualities of the messianic age.

¹⁷⁹ This is similar to, Jeremiah 1:5 “Before I created you in the stomach I knew you, and before you exited the womb I consecrated you, I made you a prophet to the nations.”

¹⁸⁰ In this metaphor, God is father, Zion is mother, and the Israelites are the children.

¹⁸¹ This continues the metaphor noted in footnote 180. Also note the chiastic structure of this statement (see footnote 113 regarding chiasms).

and bringing joy and celebration to its midst (51:3). “Give heed to me, my nation, my people to me give ear. For teaching (Torah) from me shall go forth, and my ways as a light to the nations will I bring (51:4)¹⁸². Gods victory will be complete and everlasting. Those who trust in God have no reason to fear. “The captives of God shall return, and come to Zion in song, with everlasting joy on their heads, joy and celebration will grab them, flee will sorrow and despair.¹⁸³ The prophet emphasizes God’s role in comforting the people, who thus have nothing to fear from humanity. Jerusalem, which has drunk of God’s wrath is bid to arise from its despair.¹⁸⁴ “... Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of suffering, the bowl, the cup of my

¹⁸² The implication is that Israel will be the courier of these teachings, thus bringing light to the nations. This follows on a theme we discussed with regards to 42:1-4 and is also seen in 49:6 (this is noted by the JPS Tanakh footnote on 51:4).

¹⁸³ This Yodaesque translation leaves the chiasm intact.

¹⁸⁴ 51:17 begins, “**הַתְעֹרֶרֶת** *Wake up!, Wake up!*”. These words are familiar from the Friday night hymn, “*Lecha Dodi*,” which, borrows quite a bit from the final parts of the Book of Isaiah in a poem that combines the welcoming of Shabbat with bidding people to have hope for the messianic age. Note also the repetition, which is a literary technique used often in this part of the text.

From Isaiah	<i>Lecha Dodi</i>
הַתְעֹרֶרֶת Arise, arise (51:17),	Used verbatim at the open of the 5 th stanza.
עֲוָרֵי עֹורֵי Awaken, awaken (52:1).	Used verbatim at the beginning of the 2 nd line of the 5 th stanza.
לְבָשִׂי בָגְדִי תְפִאַרְתָּךְ יְרוֹשָׁלָם עִיר wear your splendid clothes, Jerusalem, holy city (52:1).	From the 4 th stanza: לְבָשִׂי בָגְדִי תְפִאַרְתָּךְ עַמִּי wear your splendid clothes, my nation.
הַתְנַעֲרֵי מַעֲפָר קְוָמִי Shake off the dust, get up (52:2).	Used verbatim at the open of the 4 th stanza.
כִּי יִמְן וַיְשַׁמְ אֹול תִּפְרַצְי For you will spread out to the right and left (54:3).	Used verbatim at the open of the 8 th stanza.
אֲלִ פִירָאִי כִּי לֹא תִבּוֹשִׁי וְאֲלִ תִכְלַמִי כִּי לֹא Do not be afraid, for you will not be ashamed; do not be humiliated, for you will not be disgraced (54:4).	The 6 th stanza opens: לֹא תִבּוֹשִׁי וְלֹא תִכְלַמִי Do not be afraid, and do not be humiliated.
קוֹמִי אֹרֵי כִּי בָא אֹרֵךְ וְכָבֹוד ה' עַלְיךָ זָה Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord will shine upon you (60:1).	כִּי בָא אֹרֵךְ קוֹמִי אֹרֵי (arise, arise) for your light has come, arise, shine, 4 th stanza.
	כָבֹוד ה' עַלְיךָ גָלָה The glory of the Lord is revealed upon you. End of 5 th stanza.
כִּי . . . [מְשׁוֹשׁ חַתּוֹן עַל כָּלָה יִשְׁיַשׁ עַלְיכָךְ As . . . a groom rejoices over his bride, your God will rejoice over you. “ (62:5)	... יִשְׁיַשׁ עַלְיךָ אֶל_. יְה. כִמְשׁוֹשׁ חַתּוֹן עַל כָּלָה Your God will rejoice over you, as a groom rejoices over a bride.

- wrath you shall not continue to drink" (51:22) "Arise, Arise, wear your splendor, Zion, wear your splendid clothes, Jerusalem, holy city, for no longer will the uncircumcised or profane come within you" (52:1). God's nation was given in the hands of Assyria, but this brought God's name to be reviled. "Therefore, my nation shall know my name." This repeats the theme of reconciliation being for the purposes of God's glory, and not because it is necessarily deserved.
- Chapter 53 focuses largely on the suffering of God's righteous servant who bares punishment for "their" sins (53:11). Not surprisingly, Christian readers take this as a reference to Jesus. Some (e.g. Rashi) argue that the "servant" here is the people Israel (referred to in singular as God's servant at such places as both explicitly (Isa. 41:8-9; 44:1-2; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3) and implicitly (Isa. 42:19-20; 43:10).¹⁸⁵ I am not terribly comfortable with this read, as the indication in this chapter is that the victim is not at all guilty, while clearly Israel is guilty of many sins. I would prefer to read this as a reference to a contemporary prophet who may have been victimized by others, as we saw was the case for the prophet in chapter 50. Others might argue this is a reference to a Messianic king, but note that there is nothing necessitating that this be read as Jesus.
 - Chapter 54 returns to prophecies of redemption, picturing Israel as a previously barren woman given birth: "Shout, barren one, who has not borne child . . . because the children of the forlorn shall outnumber those of the married" (54:1). Israel will inherit nations. Israel shall not fear nor be ashamed (54:4). For God has called Israel back just as a wife who was abandoned in youth (54:6). "In but a short moment I abandoned you, but with abundant mercy I gather you" (54:7). Just as God gave a covenant to Noah to never again destroy the Earth after the flood, God promises Israel: "This is like the waters of Noah to me, wherein I promised to remove the waters of Noah forever from the Earth, thus I promise [I will refrain] from being angry with you and rebuking you. For the mountains may move, and the hills shake, but my righteousness will never be removed from you, and my covenant of peace will not shake, says your consoler, the Lord" (54:9-10).
 - Chapter 55 calls for people to come to God. "Oh, all thirsty come for water, those who have no money come buy food," asking people why they seek out what is not bread. If people follow God's word, they will prosper. The people will "go out (of the Babylonian exile) in joy, and in peace return (to Israel)" (55:12).
 - Chapters 56-66 Prophecies of social and religious rebuke and of hope.
 - Chapter 56 presents a prophecy of God's salvation (bidding people to do justice because God's salvation is coming). God will gather the Israelites, together with any foreigners who choose to attach themselves to God: "Let not the stranger who attaches to God say: God has separated me from his nation . . ." (56:3). This is a prime example of the ecumenicism of Isaiah 2/3. Even the eunuch who keeps the Sabbath and holds fast to God's covenant will know eternal reward: "I will give to them within My house and My walls a monument and a name¹⁸⁶, better than sons and daughters, an everlasting name will I give them, which shall not be cut off." All

¹⁸⁵ <http://www.jewsforjudaism.org/web/faq/faq136.html>.

¹⁸⁶ Everlasting name = *Yad Vashem*. Read over this verse and consider its choice as the name of the Holocaust memorial in Israel.

foreigners who come to minister¹⁸⁷ to God: “I will bring them to my holy mountain, and cause them to rejoice in my house of prayer, their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be welcome upon my alter, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” (56:7).

- The end of Chapter 56 through Chapter 57 is a rebuke, picturing a fat people, lazy and gluttonous. They commit idolatry and immorality, “who slaughter children in the wadis” (57:5) How could God possibly look away from their misdeeds (57:6). God calls out “Build a way, build a way. Clear out impediments from before my people.” (57:14).¹⁸⁸ God will not be angry forever, but will provide healing. Chapter 58 bids a voice be raised (by the prophets) “to tell my nation of their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins” (58:1). The people seek God and wonder why God does not answer. It is because as they go through religious motions such as fasting, they do their business, and oppress laborers. “Isn’t the fast that I desire one which unlocks fetters of wickedness, and unties the cords of the yoke, that lets the oppressed go free; and breaks off every yoke. Isn’t it to share your bread with the hungry, and to take the wrteched poor into your home; when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to ignore your own kin.” (58:6-7) Only then will light shine forth for the people, and God will answer when people call (58:8-9). So too, people should make Shabbat a day of rest and enjoyment, refraining from their business pursuits When the people call Shabbat a joy, then people can seek joy from God. (58:13-14).
- Chapter 59 is a powerful and eloquent indictment of the people, telling them that God is not incapable of bringing salvation, “Rather, your iniquities are separating you from your God, and your sins have hidden [God’s] face from listening to you.¹⁸⁹ For your palms are profaned with blood, and your fingers with transgression, your lips speak lies, your tongues spew treachery.” (59:2-3). People abuse the “justice” system, and commit all forms of evil.¹⁹⁰ This is why the people hope for light, but get darkness (59:9). God will bring retribution as deserved, and then a redeemer will come to Zion (59:20) “This is my covenant with them, says the Lord, my spirit which is upon you, and my words which I place in your mouth, will not cease from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your children, nor from the mouth of your children’s children, says the Lord, from now until forever.” (59:21-22).
- Chapter 60 is a prophecy of hope. Darkness will cover the earth, but God will shine God’s glory upon the people. Zions’s children will return¹⁹¹. The riches of nations will come to Zion. Foreign kings will build her walls and tend to her. The children

¹⁸⁷ חנילוים hanilvim to God, same root as the word Levi.

¹⁸⁸ These words begin the Haftorah on Yom Kippur, my personal favorite.

¹⁸⁹ The metaphor that God’s face being hidden is used throughout the Bible. See e.g. Deut. 31:17-18. Many writers about the Holocaust speak of it as the most terrible example of God’s hidden face. For other examples of this metaphor, see for example Isaiah 64:6 (below p. 85, text accompanying footnote 192, Ezekiel 39:23 (p. 123 text accompanying footnote 323), and Micah 3:4 (p. 147, text accompanying footnote 430).

¹⁹⁰ An interesting textual reference is 59:16 which says of God “He saw there was no man, he looked, but no one interceded” the same words used to describe Moses when he sees the Egyptian taskmaster striking the Israelite in Exodus 2:12

¹⁹¹ The subject of the address is not explicit, but it stands to reason that it is Zion.

of those who tormented Zion will come and prostrate themselves, and call Zion “City of the Lord, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.” (60:14) “No longer will the sun be your light by day, nor will the radiance of the moon give you light at night, the Lord will be your light forever, and your God will be your glory.” (60:19) “And your nation, all of them righteous, will forever inherit the earth, the sprout which I planted, my handiwork through which I glorify myself.” (60:21)

- Chapter 61 is written in the first person. The spirit of God is upon the speaker, whom God has anointed to bring good news to the humble, announcing God’s favor and vindication, replacing mourning with celebration. Aliens will serve the Israelite population, which will be known as Priests of God. The speaker rejoices in God’s clothing him in clothes of triumph. In Chapter 62 the speaker declares that he will not be silent until Zion’s triumph is complete. Zion will no longer be called forsaken or desolate, but rather “I choose her” or “married.” “As a youth marries a maiden, your sons will marry you, and [as] a groom rejoices over his bride, your God will rejoice over you.” (62:5) The speaker has appointed watchpeople upon the walls of Jerusalem who will not be silent until Jerusalem is established and renowned (62:6). Jerusalem will no longer be plundered by enemies – its inhabitants will enjoy its produce. The people will be called “redeemed of the Lord,” and Zion will be called “Sought out, a city which is not forsaken.” (62:12)
- Chapter 63 pictures coming from Edom, in majestic attire reddened with the blood of those whom God has trampled. The speaker, though, remembers God’s righteousness. God was there for the people in their need, but the people rebelled, and God became an enemy. The speaker, ironically blaming God for this situation, says: “Why do you cause us to stray from your path, oh Lord, do you turn our hearts from having awe for you . . . We have become as a people whom you never ruled, upon whom your name was never called.” (63:17-19) The people are downtrodden and Jerusalem destroyed, but no one calls out to God because God has been hidden from them (64:6).¹⁹² The speaker implores God not to be overly angry, because God, after all, is their creator (64:7-8).¹⁹³
- Chapter 65 reads as a response to the preceding: “I sought out those who did not ask, was available to those who did not inquire, said ‘here I am’ to a nation that didn’t call out in my name.” (65:1) The people constantly engage in idolatry and eat pigs flesh. As someone might take good grapes from a cluster, so God “will take out of Jacob a seed” (65:9) but those who forsook God will be destroyed, because they did not heed God’s call. “My servants will shout out of gladness, and you will scream out of pain, and howl because of your broken spirit.” (65:14) God will create a new world, with a joyous Jerusalem (65:1, 19). “And it will be that before they call out, I will answer; while they are still talking, I will listen. The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, the serpent, dust will be his food, they will not do evil or destruction in all my holy mountain, says the Lord.”

¹⁹² Regarding the metaphor of God “Hiding God’s face,” see above, footnote 189 on Isaiah 59:2-3, page 84.

¹⁹³ 64:7 reads in part, “we are the clay, you the potter” which was borrowed by the popular high holiday liturgical poem (*ki hineh kachomer*).

- Chapter 66 is a collection of prophecies, some easier to understand than others. The chapter begins by speaking of God's transcendence, and the inability to reduce God into any house of worship. "Thus says the Lord: The heavens are my throne, and the earth my footstool; what house could you build for me, and what place could be my place of rest." (66:1) Verse 3 compares certain religious acts to acts of religious immorality. The point is not clear. Some view this as a rejection of the religious practices. Others see it as an indictment of those who perform these religious acts while living unjust and immoral lives. The chapter continues with visions of God's retribution "A sound of tumult from the city" (66:6, trans per JPS) but mostly about a utopian future "Before she has labor, she will give birth" (66:7) "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and celebrate in her, all who love her, celebrate with her a celebration, all who mourn for her." (66:10) "For thus says the Lord: I will extend to her as a river, peace , and as a stream, prosperity . . ." (66:12) Israelites will be gathered from all over the Earth, and will come to sacrifice in the Temple, and some will serve as priests (66:18-21). The peoples' progeny will be as everlasting as the new heavens and earth that God will create (see 65:1). "And it will be month after month, and Shabbat after Shabbat, all flesh will come to bow before me, says the Lord." (65:23).

2) *Jeremiah*

For further background into Jeremiah, see "Overview of Biblical Books" found in the JPS Bible Commentary Book on Haftorahs, and the Encyclopedia Judaica article on Jeremiah.

The book of Jeremiah, not surprisingly, covers the life and prophecies of the prophet Jeremiah. The opening of the book tells us that he operated from the thirteenth year of King Josiah (627 BCE) through the eleventh year of King Zedekiah (586 BCE). His prophecies are largely prophecies of doom and gloom, though they also have indication of hope for future reconciliation and rebuilding. The doom is caused by Israel's shattering its covenant with God, both through interpersonal and religious immorality. In the end, God will reestablish the covenantal relationship with Israel (as with Isaiah, no indication is given that this is precipitated by acts of repentance). Throughout the book, we see that Jeremiah is vastly unpopular and tormented because of his prophecies, though he constantly follows God's instructions, rather than pressure from humans. Nonetheless, his compassion for the people and the severity of their punishment is seen. Jeremiah is of priestly dissent, and speaks with erudite knowledge of religious law and text, references to which are made throughout the work.

The first 25 chapters report oracles of Jeremiah. Chapters 26 through 45 is a historical report of Isaiah's works. Chapters 46 through 51 are Jeremiah's oracles against foreign nations. Chapter 52 closes the book with an account of the fall of Jerusalem. Interestingly, the book of Jeremiah is not arranged chronologically, so that often the book will jump around in time.

Some recurring themes in Jeremiah are:

- Jeremiah uses the metaphor of God and Judah as husband and wife.
- Jeremiah's prophesies are interrupted by words of prayer/response to God, presumably the words of Jeremiah, hoping to avert destruction.

- God's tells Jeremiah not to pray on behalf of the people, as they must be punished for their wrongdoing.¹⁹⁴
- The people of Judah, though blameworthy, are also influenced with false leaders who tell them that everything is OK.
- Jeremiah often discusses Jewish law and makes references to other biblical texts and traditions, particularly from the book of Deuteronomy.

Below is an outline of Jeremiah, largely based on a chart in Encyclopedia Judaica

- Chapter 1: The call of Jeremiah. This piece largely serves as an introduction to the book, telling us first Jeremiah's name and where his family is from (Anatot, in Benjamin). We are told that God's word came to Jeremiah during the 13th year of Josiah's reign, and continued through the reign of Yehoyakim, through the 12th year of Zedekiah, until the fall of Jerusalem. Jeremiah tells us that God told him that he was chosen as a prophet even while his mother was still pregnant.¹⁹⁵ Jeremiah protests that he is too young, and is not eloquent.¹⁹⁶ God promises to supply Jeremiah's words and to protect Jeremiah. God touches Jeremiah's mouth and says "I have placed my words in your mouth." God shows Jeremiah a vision of a branch of an almond tree (*shaked*), which God explains is symbolic that God watches (*shoked*) to bring God's words to pass. Jeremiah also sees a steaming pot facing North, which God says is symbolic that evil will befall the people of the land, and will come from the North. God will exact judgment for the people's for their idolatry. Jeremiah is instructed to speak to the people all that God instructs him: "do not fear them lest I destroy you before them". (1:17) God says that God will make Jeremiah like a walled city, protected from all those against whom he speaks.
- Chapter 2 begins Jeremiah's prophecies against the people. God tells Isaiah to proclaim to the people, "Thus said God: I remember the righteousness of your youth, your bridelike love, your walking after me in the wilderness in an unplanted land." (2:2)¹⁹⁷ The people have abandoned God, they have not sought the God who took them out of Egypt and protected them in the wilderness (in stark contradiction to God's remembering that experience). The *cohanim* don't seek God, those who have Torah do not know it, the leaders ("sheppards") sin and the prophets prophesize Baal. God will therefore continue to battle with the people and bring them to destruction. Neither alliance with Egypt or Assyria will help when the people abandon God: "What [good] is it for you to go down to Egypt to drink the water of the Shichor (Nile), and [good] is it for you to go down to Assyria to drink the water of The River (Euphrates)? Your evil will reprove you, your afflictions will chastise you; know and see how bad and bitter is your abandoning the Lord your God, that my awe is not upon you, declares A-donai, Lord of Hosts." (2:18-19) The

¹⁹⁴ Here, God is telling Jeremiah not to fulfill the classic role of the prophet as intercessor. Compare below p. 140 footnote 398 and accompanying text regarding the role of prophet as intercessor.

¹⁹⁵ Compare Isaiah 49:1, above p. 81, text accompanying footnote 179.

¹⁹⁶ Most prophets protest their worthiness, for example Moses at the burning bush, Exodus chapter 3-4, e.g. "And Moses said to the Lord, please, Lord, I have never been a man of words . . ."

¹⁹⁷ This is a much rosier (perhaps idealized) image of the Israelite experience in the Sinai wilderness.

people have flocked after false Gods. “They say to trees: ‘You are my father’, and to stones: ‘you gave birth to me’; but they have turned their backs to me, and not their faces, but at the time of evil they will say: ‘arise and save me.’ Where are your gods, whom you made for yourself, let them get up and save you at the time of evil, for the number of your towns are [as the number of] your gods, oh Judah.” (2:27-28) Punishment thus far has been pointless, they haven’t listened to instruction, instead their swords “devoured the prophets.” (2:30) They have forgotten God, and “even in their garments is found the blood of the lives of innocent poor,” (2:34) and yet they continue to delude themselves into believing they are without sin (2:35). But God has rejected them, and they will not prosper. Chapter 3 compares Israel to a woman who has been divorced and remarried, who cannot remarry her first husband, “would that not defile the land” (3:1)¹⁹⁸. Nonetheless, despite the fact that Israel has “whored herself with many lovers” (3:1), God will allow them to return. In verse 7 and following, God speaks to Jeremiah during the reign of Josiah of what “Backturning Israel”¹⁹⁹ did prostituting herself (i.e. committing idolatry) at every place. Israel did not repent, and she was sent away. God gave her a bill of divorce. “Her Faithless Sister Judah”²⁰⁰ saw this, but was not afraid (i.e. of having the same thing happen to her). The faithless can turn back to God and will be accepted back to Zion and blessed with good leaders “after my own heart, who will Shepard you with knowledge and skill.” (3:14) All nations will come together in Jerusalem²⁰¹ and “will no longer follow the evil of their hearts (3:18). The final part of Chapter 3 pictures the prayer of a repentant people “Let us lie in our embarrassment, and be covered by our disgrace, for we have sinned towards our Lord God, we and our forbearers from our youth to this day, and we have not listened to our Lord God.” (3:25)

- Chapter 4 through 6 consists of prophecies of destruction coming from the North. The people are bid to repent, “Be circumcised,²⁰² to the Lord, and remove the foreskin of your hearts, men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest my rage go out as a fire, and burn without one to extinguish due to the evil of your wrongdoing.” (4:4) “A lion has come up from his thicket, the destroyer of nations has set out, come out of his place, to make your land desolate, your cities will be destroyed and without inhabitant” (4:7) “It will be that on that day, declares the Lord, the king’s heart will be lost, as well as the heart of the servants, the *cohanim* will gasp and the prophets will be shocked” (4:9) The destruction is caused by the peoples’ behavior: “Cleanse your hearts from evil, Jerusalem, so that you may be saved; for how long will you retain your evil thoughts within you? . . . Your way and your evildoing have done this to you, this is your punishment which is bitter, which grabs at your heart.” (4:14, 18) “Roam the streets of Jerusalem, see and know, look in her roads, if you should find a man, if there are those who do justice and seek faithfulness,

¹⁹⁸ See Deuteronomy 24:1 and following which proscribes the woman from remarrying her first wife, “so that you not defile the land.” (Deut. 24:4)

¹⁹⁹ I.e. the Northern Kingdom.

²⁰⁰ I.e. the Southern Kingdom.

²⁰¹ The idea of all nations worshipping God at the Temple in Jerusalem is prominent in a number of prophetic works. See the introductions to Isaiah, above p. 72, Micah, below p. 146, Haggai, below p. 155, and Zechariah, below p. 157. See also Jeremiah Chapter 3, p. 88 footnote 201 and accompanying text.

²⁰² Cf Deut 10:16 “circumcise the foreskin of your heart.”

such that I should forgive her.”²⁰³ (5:1) The people have betrayed God, and ignored the prophets (5:11-12). Therefore a far away nation will come to destroy the land. “They will consume your harvest and bread, will consume your sons and daughters, will consume your sheep and cattle, will consume your grapes and figs, will beat by sword your fortified cities upon which you rely.” (5:17) Even so, the people will not be eliminated (5:18).

- Chapter 7 through 8:3 presents a prophecy which God commands Jeremiah to deliver at the gates of the Temple, calling for the people to return to God’s way. “Do not put your trust in lies . . . For if you improve your ways and your deeds, and if you do justice between a man and his fellow. Stranger, orphan, and widow do not oppress, and do not spill innocent blood in this place, and after other gods do not follow to hurt yourself. Then I will rest you in this place, in the land that I gave to your forbearers forever and ever.” (7:4-7) God appeals to what happened to Shilo²⁰⁴ as precedent demonstrating that God is willing to have God’s temple destroyed due to the people doing wrong (7:12ff)²⁰⁵. God tells Jeremiah (presumably) “You, don’t pray for this nation, and don’t raise a voice of crying and prayer, do not approach me, for I will not listen to you. Do you not see what they do in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem?” (7:16-17) The sacrifices brought by the people are pointless while the people do not follow God’s way, “For I did not speak your forbearers, nor command them on the day I took them out of the land of Egypt regarding offerings and sacrifices, but rather that which I commanded them saying, ‘listen to my voice and I will be for you a God, and you will be a nation for me, and follow all the ways which I command you, so that it be good for you.’” (7:22-23) The time of destruction will come, “And the carcasses of this people will be food for birds of the sky and animals of the land, without any to scare [them off]. And I will terminate from the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, the sound of joy and the sound of celebration, the sound of groom, and the sound of bride²⁰⁶, for the land will be in ruin.” (7:34) “Death will be preferable to life for all the remaining remnant from this evil family, in all the places that they remain, whereto I expel them, declares the Lord of Hosts.” (8:3)
- Chapter 8 decries a people who do not turn back from their evil ways. “ . . . there is no one who regrets his wrongdoing, saying ‘What have I done’ . . . (8:6) Therefore, everything will be plundered. Both priest and prophet misguide the people “saying

²⁰³ This verse calls to mind Abraham’s conversation with God regarding the destruction of Sodom and Gemora, see Gen. 18:16-33.

²⁰⁴ Presumably referring to the defeat of the Israelites at the hands of the Philistines, where the Ark of the Covenant was captured, see 1 Samuel 4-7.

²⁰⁵ Often in the Bible God is exhorted not to harm/destroy God’s people because it would reflect badly on God. Several times in Jeremiah, God is asked not to bring destruction for “God’s name’s sake.” See e.g. 14:7, 14:21. Similarly, Moses argues that destroying the Israelites in the Sinai wilderness would lead others to believe that God was unable to bring the Israelites into the land. see e.g. Numbers 14:13-16.

²⁰⁶ The image is reversed in a prophecy of future times, in Jeremiah 33:10-11 (see below p.98 text accompanying footnote 237), which lend their words to a common song at Jewish weddings, “May once again be heard in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, the sound of joy and the sound of celebration, the sound of groom, and the sound of bride.”

‘shalom, shalom,’ but there is no *shalom*.” (8:11) God is pictured as troubled by the necessary punishment of the people, “I seek comfort in my grief, my heart is sick within me. Behold, the outcry of my nation, from a land far away ‘Is there no God in Zion? is there no King in her?’ Why did they anger me with their idols, with their foreign futilities” (8:19) Chapter 9 pictures God wishing to be rid of God’s people, who constantly cheat and deal unjustly. This is why God will bring destruction. This theme continues towards the end of Chapter 10 (10:17-25). In the middle (9:22-10:16) there is a series of sayings presented by the prophet, e.g. “Thus says the Lord: Let not the wise be praised for his wisdom, nor the mighty be praised for his might, nor the rich for his richness. Rather, through this shall the praised be praised, be wise and know Me, for I am the Lord who does kindness, law, and justice in the land, because it is these that I desire, declares the Lord.” (9:22-23) Chapter 10 closes with a prediction of destruction, and a prayer: “A noise is coming, and a great racket from the north, to make the cities of Judah desolate, a den of jackals. I know, Oh Lord, that a person does not control his path, and that a person walking cannot make his own steps straight. Chastise me, oh Lord, but within measure, in your rage do not reduce me. Pour out your wrath on the nations who do not know you, and upon the families who do not call you in your name, for they have devoured Jacob, devoured and consumed him, and made his home desolate.²⁰⁷” (10:22-25)

- Chapter 11 begins with God’s message concerning the covenant between God and the Israelites. The Israelites were to follow God’s law, and God would fulfill God’s promise to Israel’s forebearers to give them the land of Canaan. The Israelites have not held up their side of this bargain. “They did not listen, and did not incline their ear, and they went each person according to their evil desires, so I brought upon them all the things (i.e. punishments) in this covenant which I commanded them to follow and they did not follow.” (11:8) God will bring disaster. The people will call out to God and God will not listen. They will then call out to the other gods that they have worshiped, who will not save them. “For the number of your towns are [equal to] the number of your gods, Judah, and in accordance to the number of roads in Jerusalem you have made altars to shame²⁰⁸, altars to sacrifice to Ba’al.” (11:13) Jeremiah is again told not to pray for the people, “... for I will not listen at the time that they call to me because of their evil.” (11:14)
- 11:18-12:6 describes threats by Jeremiah’s townspeople for his bringing God’s prophecy. “Therefore, thus says the Lord of Hosts, behold I will put retribution upon them; the young men will die by sword, their sons and daughters will die of starvation. They will have no remnant, for I shall bring evil to the people of Anatoth, a year of retribution.” (11:22-23)
- In the balance of chapter 12, God speaks in first person about the destruction of Gods’ people, temple, and land. God warns those neighbors who come to destroy the land that eventually God will destroy them and take back God’s people, “It will be after I have uprooted them, I will have mercy on them and return them, each to his inheritance, and each to his land.” (12:15) If the people learn to follow God, all will be good. Otherwise, the nation will be destroyed.
- Chapter 13 opens with a metaphor. Jeremiah is instructed to take a loincloth and bury it. Later he is told to take it out, and it has become destroyed and useless. This is what will

²⁰⁷ 10:25 appears in the *Haggadah* during Elijah’s cup.

²⁰⁸ *Boshet*, shame, is a derogatory name for Ba’al.

happen to Judah because of their sins. Jeremiah continues to speak about the upcoming punishment, which is now inevitable, “Can an Ethiopian change his skin, or a leopard his spots? Similarly, can you do good, those learned in evil?”

- Chapter 14 describes God’s word during a drought. The drought is described in detail (people unable to find water, grass does not grow . . .). There is a prayer for God’s help, “If our sins are answering against us, Lord, act for your name’s sake, for our rebellions are great, we have sinned towards you. . . .” (14:7) God exhorts Jeremiah not to pray for the people (14:11), because God will not listen to their prayers during a fast, nor to their sacrifices. Jeremiah attempts to defend the people by saying that the prophets are telling the people that everything will be OK. God says that these prophets are lying. Such prophets will be eliminated, and the people will die by famine and sword, without anyone to bury them. God tells Jeremiah to speak to them about his (God’s or Jeremiah’s?) sadness over the destruction of the people. The chapter closes with a prayer for God’s forgiveness for God’s name’s sake. “Do any of the false gods of the nations bring rain, can the skies bring rain? Are you not the Lord God? We will put our hope in you, for you have done all this.” (14:22)
- Chapter 15 begins with God telling Jeremiah that his prayers are futile, “The Lord said to me, even if Moses and Samuel stood before me, my soul would not [turn] towards this people . . . ” (15:1) They will meet many forms of punishment, “And I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, because of Menasha son of Yechizkiyahu, King of Judah, for what he did in Jerusalem.” (15:4)²⁰⁹ Chapter 15 continues with oracles of destruction intermingled with confessional of Jeremiah. God says, though, that if the people return, all will be secure. At the open of Chapter 16 God tells Jeremiah not to marry or have children, because the children are condemned to suffer horrible deaths. Again God says that God will eliminate “from this place” “the sound of celebration, the sound of groom, and the sound of bride.” (16:9)²¹⁰ God tells Jeremiah that when the people ask why they are being punished, he should say that it is because their forbearers abandoned God and went after false gods, and that they themselves have done so even worse, each doing whatever they care to. Chapter 16 continues with more foretelling of destruction due to the people’s sins.
- Chapter 17 is largely a hodgepodge. Israel’s sin is “written with an iron pen.” (17:1) “You destroy by yourself your inheritance which I gave you.” (17:4) “Thus says the Lord, Cursed is the person who trusts in man . . . Blessed is the person who trusts in the Lord, the Lord will be his security . . . ” (17:5-7) The heart is crooked, but God understand a persons intentions (17:9-10). Misbegotten gain is soon lost (17:11). Those who forsake God will come to shame (17:13). “Heal me, Lord, and I will be healed, save me, and I will be saved. For You are my hope.” (17:14)²¹¹ “Let my pursuers be ashamed, and let

²⁰⁹ See above on 2 Kings 21, page 69.

²¹⁰ See above footnote 206 and text thereon.

²¹¹ The prayer for healing in the daily Amidah uses these words (though changing the words to plural, as we generally pray in plural. See above “We Pray in Plural” p. 13. That line of the Amidah is the basis of the line from Fiddler on the Roof “As the Good Book says, ‘Heal us, O Lord, and we shall be healed..’ In other words, send us the cure. We’ve got the sickness already.” Note that Tevye often quotes words of prayers as “The good book.” He probably presumes these words form his prayer book are quotes of the Bible.

me not be ashamed, let them be dejected, and let me knot be dejected. Bring upon them a bad day, and break them with double destruction.” (17:18)

- 17:19-27 is a prophecy which God commands Jeremiah to deliver at the gate to Jerusalem where kings of Judah go in and out, as well as all other gates of Jerusalem. “Thus says the Lord: Be careful for your lives, and do not carry a carried item on the Sabbath day and bring it through the gates of Jerusalem. Do not take out something that is carried from your house on the Sabbath day, and all work you shall not do, and you shall sanctify the day of the Sabbath I commanded your forebearers.”²¹² (17:20-21) If the people follow this law, then Kings of Judah will come through the gate with pomp and dignity, and people will flock through the gates to bring sacrifices. “But if you do not listen to me to sanctify the Shabbat, and to refrain from carrying your carried item and coming through the gates of Jerusalem on the Shabbat day, then I will set flame to your gates, and it will devour the fortress of Jerusalem, and will not be extinguished.” (17:27)
- In Chapter 18, Jeremiah is instructed to go to a potter’s house to receive God’s word. Jeremiah sees that as the potter works, a pot breaks and the potter makes it into a different vessel as was possible based on the shape it was left in. God says that like the clay in the potter’s hand, God can punish and destroy the people, or reconcile with them and build them up.²¹³ God tells Jeremiah to tell the people that God is angry, and they should change their evil ways. God tells Jeremiah that they will refuse to listen, and destruction will come.
- In 18:18, Jeremiah speaks of plots against him. He complains to God that the people are repaying Jeremiah’s good deeds (pleading to God on behalf of the people) with evil (plots against Jeremiah), and Jeremiah asks God to destroy Jeremiah’s enemies.
- Chapter 19 begins with God telling Jeremiah to purchase a earthenware jug and gather elders and *cohanim* in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom²¹⁴. He is to tell them that God is bringing destruction because the people have abandoned God, served false gods, spilled innocent blood, sacrificed their children to Ba’al, etc. Their carcasses will become food for animals, and they will eat their children because of the desperation that their enemies will cause (19:9).²¹⁵ Jeremiah is to smash the jug, and explain that this is symbolic of how God will smash the people.
- Chapter 20 tells us that Pashchur son of Immar the Priest, who was the chief officer of the Temple heard Jeremiah’s prophecy and had Jeremiah flogged and imprisoned for one day. The next day, Pashchur released Jeremiah, and Jeremiah tells Pashchur about the

²¹² The Five Books of Moses do proscribe *melacha* (“work”) on Shabbat, but do very little to define work (we are told not to kindle a flame, and we are told that work on building the Tabernacle was stopped on Shabbat). This verse of Jeremiah is the first time in the Bible that carrying an item through a gate or taking something out of one’s home is specifically forbidden.

²¹³ The words of 18:6 are borrowed in a famous song on Yom Kippur. 18:6 reads in part “. . . Behold, like clay in the hands of a potter, so are you in my hands, house of Israel.”

²¹⁴ A valley outside the walls of Jerusalem. Amongst other things, it was a place of idolatry and child sacrifice. The Valley of Ben-Hinnom (in Hebrew *Gay ben Hinnom*) is also the source for the Hebrew word for the Jewish version of Hell.

²¹⁵ The language of 19:9 is strikingly similar to the Moses rebuke in Deuteronomy 28:53, 28:55, and 28:57.

destruction of Jerusalem, and how Pashchur and his family would be taken captive. “You, Paschur, and all those who dwell in your house shall be taken captive, and will come to Babylonia, where you will die and be buried, you and all who like you, to whom you have prophesied falsely.” (20:6)

- In 20:7-18, Jeremiah talks about how Jeremiah followed God and has been persecuted for doing so. Jeremiah considered stopping to convey God’s words, but the words burned in his heart and had to come out. Jeremiah says his enemies wait for an opportunity to get him, but God protects him. “Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord, for he has saved the soul of the needy, from the hands of the evildoers.” (20:13) Nonetheless, Jeremiah is also bitter about his life, wishing to have never been born, “Why did I come out of the womb, to see trouble and travail, and to spend my days in shame.” (20:18)
- Chapter 21 through 24 are prophecies to Judean Kings and prophets. Chapter 21 starts with a prophecy of Jeremiah when King Tzidkiyahu²¹⁶ sent messengers to Jeremiah saying “Seek out the Lord on our behalf, for Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon is making war with us, perhaps the Lord will do for us in accordance with all his wonders, and [Nebuchadnezzar] will leave us.” (21:2) Jeremiah says that God says that God will war with the Judeans, killing them with pestilence, famine, etc., after which Tzidkiyahu and the people will be delivered into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, who will treat them mercilessly. Jeremiah is told to tell the people that they should leave the city and surrender themselves so they can survive. Jeremiah preaches at the King’s palace in Chapter 22. Jeremiah says that if the people do justice, do not oppress strangers, and do not spill innocent blood, then “Into the gates of this palace will come Kings, descendants of David, who will sit on his throne and ride on chariots and horses. . . ” (22:4) If they do not, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that this palace will be a ruins.” (22:5) The destruction will be great, and people will come by saying to each other, “Why did the LORD do this to this great city?” and the answer will be “Because they abandoned the covenant of the LORD God, and bowed to other gods and worshiped them.” (22:8-9) 22:11 introduces a prophecy to Shalum²¹⁷ son of Yoshiyahu which decries one who “builds his house without justice” (22:13) and compares the King’s father (Josiah) who reigned in justice “and there was good for him,” (22:15), “but your eyes and heart are only on profit, and on the blood of the innocent, and on doing fraud and violence.” (22:17) 22:24 is a prophecy about King Yehoyachin.²¹⁸ He will be exiled and die in another land. “Thus says the LORD, record this man as childless, a person who will not succeed in his day, for none of his children will succeed to sit on the throne of David to rule over Judah.” (22:30)²¹⁹ Chapter 23 decries the “shepherds who lose and scatter my flock” – i.e. the

²¹⁶ Tzidkiyahu’s reign is described in 2 Kings 24:18 and following. It is during his reign that Jerusalem is destroyed and the last of the people exiled. See above p. 70.

²¹⁷ Shalum is the private name of Yehoachaz. See 2 Kings 22-23:30 for the life of Yoshiyahu, and 23:31-33 for the life of Yehoachaz. This is described above at p. 70.

²¹⁸ Called here “Coniah.” Yehoyachin son of Yehoyachim is discussed in 2 Kings 24:8 and following. See above at p. 70.

²¹⁹ In 2 Kings 24:10-17, Nevuchadnezar besieges Jerusalem, and Yehoyachin and his officers surrender to Nevuchadnezar. Nevuchadnezar appoints Yeyoachin’s uncle, Matanyah as king, changing Matanyah’s name to Tzidkiyahu, whom we met at the beginning of Chapter 21 of Jeremiah).

kings who do not lead properly. There will come a time where God will gather the remnants and appoint a shepherd to lead them. God will “Raise for David a righteous branch, who will reign as king and be wise and do justice and righteousness in the land.” (23:6) Verse 9 begins a prophecy to the prophets, speaking of how the evil of the people extend to *cohanim* and prophets. “In the prophets of Samaria (i.e. Northern Kingdom) I saw unseemliness, they prophesied by Ba’al, and they caused my nation Israel to err. But in the prophets of Jerusalem (i.e. the remaining Southern Kingdom) I see horror, adultery and ways of falsehood; they strengthen the hand of the evildoers, so that they not return from their evil; they are to me all like Sodom, and the inhabitants of Gomorrah.” (23:13-14) The prophets themselves will be punished for their misleading the people. “Thus says the LORD of Hosts, Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you; they delude you; they speak the visions of their heart, not from the mouth of the LORD.” (23:16). Chapter 24 describes a vision of Jeremiah after the exile of Yehoyachin. God shows Jeremiah two baskets of figs in front of the Temple, one basket is of good figs, one of figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten. God explains that those exiled to Babylonia will be chosen by God and returned to the land, rebuilt and not destroyed. Tzidkiyah and his servants, and the remnants still in Jerusalem, and those in Egypt will be subject to great horror.

- Chapter 25 is a prophecy of destruction of nations at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah decries the failure of the people to listen to all the prophets that God has sent to get them to repent. Therefore, Nebuchanezzar will come and exile the people. Nations will serve Babylonia for seventy years, after which the Babylonian empire will be destroyed due to its evil. Jeremiah describes being told by God to take a “cup of wine of wrath” out of God’s hands and make all the nations drink it. Jeremiah describes having nation after nation drink of the cup, starting with Jerusalem and Judah, going on to Pharaoh and the kings of Uz, Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron Jeremiah is to tell all these nations “Drink, be drunk and vomit, fall down and do not get up from the sword which I will send within you.” “For behold, in the city upon which my name is called (i.e. Jerusalem), I am starting this evil, shall you be absolved, you will not be absolved, because I am calling the sword upon all inhabitants of the land, declares the LORD of Hosts.” (25:29)
- Chapters 26 through 29 present a 3rd person account of some of Jeremiah’s life.
 - In Chapter 26, we are told that at the beginning of the reign of Yehoyakim son of Josiah, God told Jeremiah to go to preach outside the Temple.²²⁰ Jeremiah is to relay God’s entire message, “Do not leave anything out. Perhaps they will listen and each person return from his evil ways, so that I may reverse the evil which I plan to do to them because of their evil ways.” (26:3) If the people don’t listen, the Temple will suffer the same fate as Shilo.²²¹ When the people, *cohanim*, and prophets hear

²²⁰ Note that according to the beginning of the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah first received prophecy during the life of Yoshiyahu, Yehoyakim’s father. Thus, Chapter 29’s mention of Jeremiah receiving a prophecy does not imply that this was his first.

²²¹ Recall the reference to the destruction of Shilo in 7:12, footnote 204 and accompanying text on page 89.

Jeremiah,²²² they capture Jeremiah and tell him he will be killed. The Kings men also converge on the Temple. The *cohanim* say that Jeremiah is liable for execution because of the evil he has predicted. Jeremiah says that everything he said was what God told him to say. However, he says, if the people improve their ways they will avert the evil fate. “As for me, behold I am in your hands, do as is good and right in your eyes. But know, that if you kill me, [the responsibility for] innocent blood you are putting on yourselves and on this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the LORD sent me to you to speak in your ears all these words.” (26:14-15) The King’s servants and the people say to the *cohanim* and prophets that Jeremiah should not be executed, because he is speaking in the name of God. Some elders arise and reason that at the time of King Chizkiyahu, the prophet Micha predicted destruction, but that Micha²²³ was not executed. King Chizkiyahu feared God and the destruction was averted.²²⁴

- Towards the end of Chapter 26 we are told that another prophet Uriah ben Shemaiah prophesied against Jerusalem as did Jeremiah. He fled from King Yehoyakim by going to Egypt, but Yehoyakim dispatched people to bring him back, and have him executed. Uriah’s body is unceremoniously buried in “the people’s grave.”²²⁵ We are told that Achikam son of Shaphan²²⁶ protects Jeremiah from the masses who wanted to kill him.
- Chapters 27 -28 tell of Jeremiah’s prophecy concerning the yoke of Nevuchadnezar of Babylon. God tells Jeremiah to wear a yoke and to deliver a message to the emissaries of some kings who are coming to visit Jerusalem (apparently planning resistance against Nevuchadnezar). Jeremiah is to tell them that God created the earth, and can shift earthly power as God sees fit. For now, God has chosen to give power to the Babylonians. These nations should subjugate themselves to Babylonia so that they might survive. The states are advised not to listen to their prophets, magicians, etc. who tell them to resist Babylonia. Jeremiah speaks to Tzidkiyahu with a similar message. There is reference to false prophecies foretelling the return of Yehoyachin as well as the Temple material that was plundered by Babylonia at the time of Yehoyachin.²²⁷ But the opposite will be the case – whatever is still left in Jerusalem will be carried off to Babylonia until “God remembers them.” (27:22)

²²² The prophecies that Jeremiah delivered which are only briefly described in Chapter 26 likely includes many of the prophecies we have already read thus far in the book.

²²³ For more information on Micah, see below p. 146.

²²⁴ Recall that Chizkiyahu is remembered in 2 Kings 18:1-20:21 as a righteous King who followed God’s ways and destroyed altars. See above p. 69 and following.

²²⁵ I.e. a grave of commoners.

²²⁶ Though not a major character in the Bible, Achikam also appears in 2 Kings 22:12, 14 and 2 Chronicles 34:20 as one of the messengers sent by King Yoshiyahu to bring the scroll of Torah found in the Temple to Chuldah the prophetess. When Nevuchadnezar destroyed the Temple and exiled the people, Nevuchadnezar appointed Achikam’s son, Gedaliah as the governor of Jerusalem (2 Kings 2:25). We will read a bit more about Gedaliah in Jeremiah. Gedaliah’s assassination is commemorated every year with the fast of Gedaliah, on the day after Rosh Hashanah.

²²⁷ See 2 Kings 24:8-17, described above at p. 70.

Chapter 28 tells of particular false prophet Chananiah ben Uzah of Gibeon,²²⁸ who claims God has declared that in two years God will break the yoke of Babylon and Yehoyachin as well as the Temple material that were plundered by Babylonia at the time of Yehoyachin will return. In a response dripping with sarcasm, we are told, “And Jeremiah the prophet said: ‘Amen, so may God do, may God fulfill your words which you have prophesied, and return the vessels to the House of the Lord, and all the exiles from Babylonia (should be returned) to this place.’” (28:6) Jeremiah also says that “The prophet who prophecies peace, it is when the words come (true) that the prophet is known to be a prophet whom the LORD has faithfully sent.” (28:9) Chananiah breaks the yoke off of Jeremiah’s neck in public, and says that this act is symbolic of God breaking the Yoke of Babylon off the nation’s neck. But God tells Jeremiah to tell Chananiah that in fact the symbolism of his own act is that a wooden yoke is taken off the people, and replaced with one of iron. Jeremiah also predicts that Chananiah will die, which he does shortly after.

- Chapter 29 begins with a letter sent by Jeremiah to the Jews already exiled to Babylon. He tells the people to settle into life in Babylonia, marry, have children, etc., because the exile will last 70 years. He also tells them, “Seek the well-being of the city to which you have been exiled there, and pray to the LORD for it, because only with its well-being will you be well.”²²⁹ (29:7) The people are told not to listen to the prophets who tell them that they will be able to return to Israel shortly. Nonetheless, in 70 years, “When you call me and go and pray to me, I will listen to you. You will ask for me and find me when you search with all your heart.”²³⁰ (29:12-13) Jeremiah tells the people in exile that those who remain in Jerusalem will be utterly destroyed, “and will be made like horrible figs which no one would eat because of their badness.”²³¹

²²⁸ Not to be confused with the character Chananiah in the Book of Daniel.

²²⁹ This verse is seen as one of the bases for saying prayers for the government of the land where one lives, as well as a Jews general responsibilities towards participation in his/her community.

²³⁰ The image of putting all one's heart into a relationship with God is quite prevalent, particularly in the book of Deuteronomy (most famously coming up in the first and second paragraphs of Shema). The concept that such a sincere search for God would bring people back from exile is expressed by Moses in Deuteronomy 4:29 "You will seek the LORD your God from there and will find Him, when you search with all your heart and with all your soul."

וְבַקְשָׁתֶם מִשֵּׁם אֱלֹהִיךְ וְמִצְאָתֶךָ בְּכָל לְבָבֶן כִּי תִדְרְשָׂנוּ בְּכָל וּבְכָל נְפָשָׁךְ.

And with all your heart seek Him (singular) will find (God) your God from there will ask for you.

וּבְקַשְׁתָּם אָתִי וּמֵצָאתָם בְּכָל פִּי תְּדַרְשָׁנִי לְבַבְכֶם. Jer. 20:13

*with all when you and you (plural) me
your seek Him will find (God)
hearts.*

²³¹ See above prophecy in Chapter 24 of Jeremiah.

- 29:24-32 largely expresses consternation towards Shemayah the Nechelemit (a false prophet in Babylonia) for false prophecies, appointing Zephaniah son of Maaseiah as High Priest.
- Chapters 30 and 31 presents prophecies of consolation by Jeremiah. Jeremiah is instructed by God to record these prophecies in a scroll. A time is coming that God will return Israel and Judah to its place (note that thought the introduction of this prophecy mentions Judah, the rest of the prophecy uses language that refers to the Northern Kingdom (e.g. Jacob, Israel, Ephraim, etc)). God will break the yoke of the peoples' necks, and they will not be subjugated to strangers anymore, instead they will serve God and a Davidic king whom God will appoint. "You, do not fear my servant Jacob, declares the LORD, and do not be sad, Israel, for behold I will save you from afar, and your progeny from the land of captivity, and Jacob will return and be calm, quiet and without trouble. For I am with you, declares the LORD, and I will make an end to all nations wherein I scattered you, but will not make an end to you – I will punish you justly, and not leave you blameless".²³² (30:10-11) God will punish those who hurt Israel and Judah. The people will be returned and will have honor and independence. "And you will be for me a nation, and I will be for you a God."²³³ (30:22) Israel will once again find favor with God. "The LORD will redeem Jacob, and save him from a power stronger than he." (31:11). The prophecy pictures Rachel weeping over the fate of her children, who have disappeared. "Thus says the LORD, keep your voice from crying and your eyes from tearing, because there is reward for your travails, declares the LORD, and they will return from the enemy. There is hope for your future, declares the LORD, and children will return to their borders." (31:17) A time will come where God will create a new covenant with Israel and Judah. This will not be like the covenant given to their ancestors, to take them out of Egypt, as the people violated this covenant. Rather, under this covenant God will "give my Torah in their midst, and will write it on their hearts, and I will be for them a God, and they will be for me a people." (31:33) "Thus says the LORD, who made the sun to give light by day, and set the rules of the moon to give light at night . . . Only if those rules ceased before me, declares the LORD, would Israel also cease to be my nation before me for all time." (31:35-36)²³⁴ In the future a city will be built for God (i.e. Jerusalem) that will never be destroyed (31:38-40).
- Chapters 32 through 44 are a kind of biography of Jeremiah.
 - Chapter 32 is set in the 10th year of Tzidkiyah's reign, as the Babylonians had besieged Jerusalem.²³⁵ Jeremiah has been jailed by Tzidkiyah for predicting the fall of Jerusalem and the capture of Tzidkiyah (a prophecy that seems to be further fleshed out in Chapter 34). Jeremiah says that God has told him that Jeremiah's cousin, Chanamel ben Shulam will come to ask Jeremiah to purchase Chanamel's

²³² I.e. the people will be punished for their misdeeds, but not destroyed.

²³³ This expression of the mutual covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people is expressed throughout the Bible. Other occurrences include Ex. 6:7, Lev. 26:12, Jer. 7:23, 11:4, 13:11, 24:7, 30:25, 32:28, Ezekiel 11:20, 14:11, 36:28, 37:23, 37:27, Hosea 1:9, Zach. 8:8.

²³⁴ Jeremiah makes several references to the idea that God's relationship with the Jewish people is as permanent as the rules of the sun rising and setting. See also 34:20-21.

²³⁵ According to 2 Kings 25, the siege on Jerusalem started during the ninth year of Tzidkiyah's reign until the fall of Jerusalem during the 11th year of Tzidkiyah's reign.

field.²³⁶ Jeremiah gives a first person account of Chanamel coming, and his purchase of the field (including rich detail of the legal transaction). Jeremiah gives the purchase document to Baruch ben Nuriah (Jeremiah's scribe) and instructs him to store it in a earthenware jar to keep it well preserved for many years. "For thus said the LORD of hosts, God of Israel, Houses, fields and vineyards shall again be purchased in this land." (32:15) Jeremiah tells us that he prayed to God. Jeremiah eloquently praised God's power and knowledge and describes how the failures of the people to follow God's word had led to the current troubles, "And yet you told me . . . 'buy for yourself the field with money, and set up witnesses, while the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans!'" (32:25) God responds to Jeremiah saying that indeed the city would be destroyed because of the sins of the people, "Because the children of Israel and the children of Judah have only done evil in my eyes from their infancy . . . For this city has enraged me to destroy it from before me, from the day they built her until this day." (32:30-31) However, God will "gather them from all the lands to which I will scatter them in my great rage, anger and wrath and I will return them to this place and will let them dwell securely. And they will be for me a nation, and I will be for them a God. And I will give them a singular heart and one to have awe of me for all days for their own good and (the good of) their children after them." (32:37-39)

- Chapter 33 is another prophecy of future hope that Jeremiah receives while in prison. The exiles will be returned, and God will purify them from their sins. "Thus says the LORD: Once again will be heard in this place which you say is destroyed and without people or animals, in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem which are desolate without person and without inhabitant and without beast; the sound of joy and the sound of celebration²³⁷, the sound of groom, and the sound of bride, voices saying 'praise the LORD of Hosts, for the LORD is good, for his kindness is eternal,' bringing thanks to the House of the LORD, because I will return the returnees of the land as of old, says the LORD." (33:10-11) Days are coming where "I will cause to grow a righteous branch of David," (33:15) "Judah will be redeemed and Jerusalem will dwell securely" (33:16) Neither the Davidic nor the priestly line will be broken. The covenant between God and David could no more be broken than God's covenant with day and night (34:20-21).
- Chapter 34 tells of a prophecy Jeremiah is to relay to King Tzidkiyahu during the siege. God will give the city to Nevuchadnezar who will burn it. Tzidkiyahu will not escape. He will be captured and will see Nevuchadnezar face to face. Tzidkiyahu will not die by the sword either.
- 34:8 and following tells us of prophecy during a time where Jerusalem and the only other two remaining fortified cities in Judah (Lachish and Azekah) were under attack. Tzidkiyahu makes a deal with the people in Judah to release their slaves, but then the people took back their slaves. God complains about how the law of Hebrew slaves

²³⁶ Per Leviticus 25:25 and following relatives had a right to redeem land sold by another relative.

²³⁷ Recall the prediction that these sounds would be terminated in 7:34, above p.89, text accompanying footnote 206.

going free at the sabbatical year²³⁸ had been historically violated, and that now that people did the right thing and released their slaves, they are now reneging. As the people have not released their slaves, God will release the sword upon them.

- Chapter 35 jumps back in time to a prophecy of Jeremiah during the reign of Yehoyakim son of Yoshiyahu. Jeremiah is instructed to go to the Rechabites, take them to the Temple, and have them drink wine. After this introduction, the account becomes a first-person account by Jeremiah, who describes gathering the Rechabites and bringing them to the Temple, and giving them wine to drink. They refuse to drink on the grounds that their ancestor, Yonadav son of Rechav had instructed them not to drink wine, build homes, plant grapes or sow fields. God tells Jeremiah to preach to the people about how obedient the Rechabites are to their ancestor's instructions, versus how the people ignore God's law. God praises the Rechabites and promises "It shall never cease that a descendent of Yonadav son of Rechav will stand before me." (35:19).²³⁹
- Chapter 36 is a prophecy to Jeremiah during the 4th year of the reign of Yehoyakim son of Yoshiyahu. God tells Jeremiah to write a scroll with all the prophecies that Jeremiah had received to that point, for perhaps the people of Judah will listen to the warnings of disaster and will mend their ways. Jeremiah dictates his prophecies to Baruch ben Neriah his scribe. Jeremiah tells Baruch that he (Jeremiah) is in hiding, so Baruch is to go read the scroll in the Temple on a fast day, as perhaps it will inspire the people to repent. As it happens, in the 9th month of the fifth year of Yehoyakim, the people declared a fast day "before the LORD," and Baruch went and read the scroll to the people. Michyahu ben Gemariahu hears what is read and goes back to the scribes chamber in the palace to report it to the officers who were there. The officers summon Baruch to come to them with the scroll. Baruch appears and they have him read the scroll to them. When they hear the scroll they were very scared. They tell Baruch that he and Jeremiah should hide and then go report to the king. The king has the scroll brought, and as it is read to him, he cuts off the columns that have been read and throws them into a fire. The officers around the king are not struck with fear by the scroll. The king orders his son Yerchm'el and his officers to seize Baruch and Jeremiah, "but the LORD hid them." God instructs Jeremiah to dictate the scroll to Baruch again, and God speaks of how Yehoyakim will be punished, including by not having his progeny sit on the throne of David and by having his corpse left exposed to the elements. Jeremiah dictates the scroll again, along with more material that he added.
- Chapter 37 tells us that Nevuchadnezar installed Tzidkiyah (Zedekiah) as King instead of Yehoyakim's son Coniahu (AKA Yehoyachin).²⁴⁰ Tzidkiyah sends a

²³⁸ See Ex. 21:1-6 and Deut. 15:12-18.

²³⁹ For more information on the Rechabites, see Encyclopedia Judaica. They apparently lived as tent-dwelling shepards until they took refuge in Jerusalem from Nevuchadnezar. Yonadav ben Rachav was apparently quite a zealot, who in 2 Kings 10:15 participates in Yehu's slaughter following the reign of the King Achav and Izevel.

²⁴⁰ 2 Kings 23-24 fleshes this out. Yehoyakim had been installed by Pharaoh Necho (23:34), but Egypt's power had waned (24:7, cf Jer. 46:2) as Babylonia was taking territory. Yehoyachin

messenger to Jeremiah asking him to pray to God on behalf of the People. God tells Jeremiah to tell Tzidkiyah that the Babylonians will capture the city and destroy it (although the Babylonians had temporarily left to tend to the Egyptians they would be back).

- In 36:11-28: Jeremiah attempts to leave Jerusalem to go to the territory of Benjamin, but is captured and jailed. Some of the King's officers (having been told by the King that he was powerless to stop them from doing whatever they want) throw Jeremiah into a pit where he will starve to death, but one of the King's Eunuchs, Eved Melech the Cushite gets the King's permission/instructions to fish him out.²⁴¹ King Tzidkiyah sends for Jeremiah. Tzidkiyah wants Jeremiah's advice. Jeremiah originally refuses (figuring the King will kill him for his honesty), but the King promises that he will not let Jeremiah fall into the hands of the people who want to kill Jeremiah. Jeremiah says that Tzidkiyah can be saved, and Jerusalem spared if Tzidkiyah goes out to the Babylonians (i.e. surrenders). The King is worried that if he does so, he will be turned over by the Babylonians to some of the Judean defectors who will abuse him. Jeremiah assures him this will not be the case. Seemingly, Tzidkiyah does not follow Jeremiah's advice. We are told that Jeremiah remains in prison until the fall of Jerusalem.
- Chapter 39 tells of the siege of Jerusalem and the breaching of her walls. Tzidkiyah attempts to escape, but the Babylonians catch up to him and bring him to Nevuchadnezar. Tzidkiyah's children are slaughtered before his eyes, and his eyes are then gouged out.
- In 39:11-14 Nevuchadnezar has Jeremiah released. In Chapter 40 Nevuzradan the chief of the guards offers Jeremiah to go to Babylonian under his protection or otherwise to go wherever he pleases, or to stay with Gedaliah who had been placed in charge of the towns of Judah. Jeremiah chooses to go to Gedaliah in Mitzpeh "and dwelled with him among those left in the land." (40:6).
- The assassination of Gedaliah and the descent to Egypt: 40:7 starts telling us of Jews hearing about how Nevuchadnezar left a Jewish remnant in Judah under Gedaliah's leadership, and they begin to gather around him (coming from those who had not been exiled to Babylonia as well as from Moav, Amon, and Edom. Gedaliah assures them that if they serve Babylonia everything will be OK. As this happens, Gedaliah is advised by Yochanan ben Kerach (and others) that Ba'al is the King of Amon had sent Yishma'el ben Netanel to kill Gedaliah. Yochanan volunteers to kill Yishma'el, but Gedaliah does not believe the rumor and says not to kill him. Chapter 41 tells us of Yishma'el arriving²⁴² and killing Gedaliah and all the people that were with him.²⁴³ As other people arrive at Mitzpeh, Yishma'el kills them and throws their bodies into a

surrendered to Nevuchadnezar very early in Yehoyachin's reign (24:12) and Nevuchadnezar put Tzidkiyah in power (24:17).

²⁴¹ Stuck in the middle of later goings-on, 40:16-18 reports a prophecy saying that Eved Melech will survive the fall of Jerusalem.

²⁴² Mention is made that he was of royal stock, which is also mentioned in the brief description of Gedaliah's assassination 2 Kings 25.

²⁴³ Probably particularly killing those who were able-bodied. It seems that Jeremiah was present for this attack, as well as the rest of this story.

cistern. He takes captives, including the kings daughters and heads towards Amon. Yochanan ben Kerach hears what happened and goes with his entourage to attack Yishma'el. When Yishma'el's captives see Yochanan they are very happy and they escape Yishma'el. Yishma'el flees with 80 of his men back to Amon. Yochanan takes all the people and they go to Egypt, fearing Babylonian reprisal for the assassination of Gedaliah. Yochanan asks Jeremiah to pray to God to help guide them on their way. Jeremiah agrees to do so. The people agree to listen to whatever God tells Jeremiah. We are told that after 10 days, God's word comes to Jeremiah, Jeremiah gathers everyone together and relays the words of God: "If you dwell here, I will build you up and not destroy you, I will plant you and not uproot you, for I have regretted the evil which I did to you. Do not fear the King of Babylonia whom you fear, do not fear him, declares the Lord, for I am with you to save you and rescue you from him. And I will give you mercy, and will be merciful to you and return you to the land." (42:10-12) However, if the people go to Egypt because they are afraid, then war will follow them. Yochanan and the people do not believe that Jeremiah's statements are legitimate, so they go to Egypt anyway.

- Jeremiah's prophecies towards Egypt: 43:8-13 is a prophecy of Egypt's downfall to Babylonia. Chapter 44 starts with a prophecy of Jeremiah to all Jews in Egypt, saying how they had seen all the destruction that beset Judah because people worshiped other gods, etc. They are asked why they are angering God by leaving no Jews in Israel and by worshipping Egyptian gods. The Jews in Egypt will therefore be utterly destroyed, with none remaining. The people respond saying they don't believe Jeremiah, and they will continue to worship "to the Queen of Heaven"²⁴⁴ just has had always been done in Judah. They claim that the bad things started happening when they had suspended worship of the "Queen of Heaven." Jeremiah responds with more predictions of decimation.
- Chapter 45 (all of 5 verses long) is a prophecy of Jeremiah to his scribe Baruch. God says that Baruch is complaining about his troubles, but that he can't expect anything great in life as God brings destruction. At least, Baruch will get away with his life.
- Chapters 46-51 consist of Jeremiah's prophecies of destruction to foreign nations.
 - Chapter 46:1-12 is Jeremiah's prophecy "about the army of Pharaoh Necho King of Egypt . . . who was defeated by Nevuchadrezzar King of Babylonia during the fourth year of Yehoyakim son of Yoshiyahu, King of Judah."²⁴⁵ (Note that we have now jumped back in time to a point before the fall of Judah). Egypt is told to prepare for war. Egypt has designs on dominating the world, but will be resoundingly defeated by Babylonia. 46:13-28 is a prophecy Jeremiah received "at the coming of Nevuchadnezar to defeat Egypt." Egypt is told to prepare for defeat, "for the LORD has thrust them down." God will attack "Pharaoh, Egypt, her gods, her kings – Pharaoh and all who rely on him" (46:25) and place them in the hands of Nevuchadnezar. "But you, fear not, my servant Jacob, and do not worry, Israel, for I

²⁴⁴ Most probably Ashtoreth, a major pagan goddess worshipped throughout the middle East, with roles as goddess of love/fertility and war. She is also a/the consort of Baal. For more information see Encyclopedia Judaica "Ashtoreth."

²⁴⁵ Recall that Yehoyakim had been installed by Pharaoh Necho (2 Kings 23:34), See above footnote 240 and the section on the fall of Judah in 2 Kings, above p. 70.

shall save you from far away, and your progeny from the land of their captivity, and Jacob shall once again be calm (alt: Jacob shall return and be calm), be quiet and without fear. You, fear not my servant Jacob – declares the LORD – for I shall make a destruction of all the nations to where I dispersed you, but with you I will not make a destruction, I will cause you just anguish, I will not absolve you.”²⁴⁶

- Chapter 47 is a prophecy to the Philistines delivered before the Egyptians conquered Gaza. Chapter 48 is a prophecy of the destruction of Moav. Jeremiah expresses sympathy for the Moabites, and says that despite their downfall, they will be restored in the future (48:47). Chapter 49 is a prophecy to Amon. In the first verses, God complains how Amon took over land from the tribe Gad, and says that eventually war will come Amon’s way, and “Israel shall take over from those who took over from them.” The balance of the chapter is a general prophecy of destruction. Chapter 49 also includes prophecies of destruction to Edom (49:17-22), Damascus (49:23-27), Kedar & Chazor (49:28-33), and Aylam (49:34-39) (Aylam will also have a restoration, per 49:39).²⁴⁷
- Chapter 50 & 51 is a prophecy of Jeremiah to Babylonia. An attacker will come from the North (this would turn out to be the Persian empire). It will be at a time where the people of Israel and the people of Judah will be troubled and will be seeking out their God (50:4). “They shall seek Jerusalem, their faces will turn in that direction; ‘come and connect with the Lord for an everlasting covenant that shall not be forgotten.’ My nation are lost sheep, their shepherds made the wander, drove them out to mountains; they wandered from mountain to peak, they forgot their resting place.” (50:5-6) People are encouraged to flee Babylonia. The destruction will be complete (50:13). Israel was first devoured by Assyria, and then by Babylon. In turn, Babylon will be destroyed just like Assyria (50:18), and Israel will return to its land. “During those days and at that time, declared the LORD, people will seek Israel’s iniquity and there will be none, and the sins of Judah, and it shall not be found²⁴⁸, for I will forgive those whom I leave over.”²⁴⁹ (50:20) 51:34-35 pictures Zion saying that “Nevuchadnezar devoured me” and the people of Zion saying “let my blood be upon the Chaldeans (Babylonians).” God replies in 51:36 and following that God will fight their battles and take vengeance for them. In 51:59-64, we are told that Jeremiah wrote down all his prophecies against Babylonia and gave it to Seriah ben Neriyah, who was traveling to Babylonia with King Tzidkiyah during Tzidkiyah’s fourth year of his reign (about 7 years before the destruction of Jerusalem). Seriah is to read

²⁴⁶ I.e. the Jews will be justly punished for their misdeeds, but as a people they will not be destroyed and will eventually live in security in their land.

²⁴⁷ Aylam (Eng. Elam) is in modern day Iran. They had a battle with Nevuchandezar in the ninth year of Nevuchandezar’s reign (ca. 596/595 BCE) which may help date this prophecy. See Encyclopedia Judaica “Elam.”

²⁴⁸ Note the parallelism: “. . . people will seek **Israel’s iniquity** and there will be none, and **the sins of Judah**, and it shall not be found . . . ” The parallel for “people will seek” in the second phrase is implied.

²⁴⁹ I.e. people will try to find guilt in Israel so as to provide a reason for their destruction, but they will not succeed because God will have forgiven the remnant of the Jews who survived the destruction of Israel and Judah.

the scroll in Babylonia, say a prayer asking God saying that God promised to destroy Babylonia. Then Seriah is to tie the scroll to a stone and throw it into the Euphrates, saying “Thus shall Babylonia sink and not rise because of the evil which I will bring upon her and they will be wearied.” 51:64 ends with the addendum “Up to here are the words of Jeremiah.”

- Chapter 52 concludes the book of Jeremiah with an account of the destruction of Jerusalem (almost verbatim the same as the final chapter of the Book of Kings (2 Kings 25:9). We are told that Tzidkiyahu was 21 years old, and in power for 11 years. He did evil before God, just as Yehoyakim had. Jerusalem and Judah had angered God, and Tzidkiyahu rebelled against Babylon. In Tzidkiyahu’s 9th year, in the tenth day of the tenth month²⁵⁰ Nevuchadnezar besieged Jerusalem. The siege lasted into the eleventh year of Tzidkiyahu’s reign. By the 9th day of the fourth month (Tamuz) the lack of food became acute. The walls were breached, and the soldiers fled, exiting a double-gate by night. The Babylonians chased them and caught Tzidkiyahu around Jericho, and the rest of the troops scattered. Tzidkiyahu was brought to Nevuchadnezar, who slaughtered Tzidkiyahu’s sons and gouged out Tzidkiyahu’s eyes. On the ninth day of the fifth month²⁵¹ Nevuzradan, the Chief of the guards in the Babylonian army set fire to the Temple and the King’s castle, and to the houses of all notable people in Jerusalem, etc. The remaining people were exiled. The destruction and pillaging of the Temple is described in detail. The number of people exiled in particular years is listed. The book of Jeremiah ends just as the book of Kings did, telling us that King Yehoyachin was released from prison by King *Evil*²⁵² *Mardoch* and he lives out his life under the care of the King.

²⁵⁰ The tenth day of Teveth, observed to this day as a fast day (from dawn until the stars come out). This date is also mentioned in 2 Kings 25:1-2 and Ezekiel 24:1 (see below, footnote 294 and accompanying text).

²⁵¹ The Ninth of Av, observed to today as a full-day fast (from sundown the day before until the stars come out the next day).

²⁵² “Evil” is a transliteration, not a translation.

3) *Ezekiel*

Note: As always, this introduction is based on *Encyclopedias Judaica* “Ezekiel” and the JPS Haftorah Commentary overview of “Ezekiel.”

According to Ezekiel 1:1-3, Ezekiel was exiled to Babylonia during the exile during King Yehoyachin’s reign (597 BCE)²⁵³, and received prophecy while in Babylonia, starting in the fifth year the exile (i.e. ca. 592 BCE)²⁵⁴. His prophecies date through 571 BCE (JPS).

The book of Ezekiel is fairly carefully structured. The first 24 chapters of Ezekiel are largely prophecies of doom (within this section several of the chapters are clustered thematically), chapters 25-32 are prophecies against other nations, and chapters 33-48 are largely prophecies of consolation.

Ezekiel is a priest, and this likely accounts for his interest in priestly matters, discussions of the Temple in Jerusalem, and his knowledge of priestly tradition (though, granted there are some struggles where his statements of the law seem to diverge from the Five Books of Moses²⁵⁵), language, and ideology.

The book of Ezekiel holds to a fairly consistent stylistic form. It is almost entirely a first-person report of Ezekiel’s communications with God. Particular formulas are often used. For example, prophecies often begin with the words “**וַיֹּאמֶר** ה' אֲלֵיכָם – *and the word of the LORD was to me,*” God generally refers to Ezekiel as “**בָּנֶון** אָדָם – *Son of man/human,*” God’s message is often preceded with “**כִּי** אָמַר ה' – *thus says the LORD,*” etc. Many messages end with the words “**וְיַדְעָתָם** כִּי אָנִי ה'” *And you will know that I am the LORD.*” Ezekiel is also more fastidious in dating his prophecies than any of the other prophets.

Ezekiel’s visions are often quite picturesque, for example the famed vision of the dry bones. His behaviors are often strikingly emphatic and extreme.

Some recurring themes in Ezekiel are:

- The discussion of the fairness of God’s punishment

²⁵³ Described in 2 Kings 24:8 and following. See above p. 70, footnote 154 and accompanying text.

²⁵⁴ Traditional Rabbinic commentary asserts that Ezekiel must have already received prophecy while in Israel, arguing that prophecy comes to a person only in Israel. See e.g. Rashi on Ezekiel 1:3.

²⁵⁵ Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 13b: “Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: Remember that man for good, and Chananiah ben Chizkiah was his name, for were it not for him, the Book of Ezekiel would have been hidden (i.e. excluded from the canon), because its words conflicted with the words of the Torah. What did he do? They brought him three hundred barrels of oil, and he sat in an attic and expounded (i.e. reconciled) them.” Unfortunately, the Talmud does not preserve how Chananiah reconciled these texts.

- That God's treatment of Israel is often determined by how what happens to Israel reflects on God. Since Israel is seen as God's people, punishing Israel for its sins by being defeated by other nations may have the adverse effect of making God look powerless.
- As in many prophets, the behavior of the Jews is likened to marital infidelity.
- The people are said to have been disloyal to God even while they were still in Egypt and throughout their time in the Sinai wilderness and when in Israel.
- The ability of a person to change his/her fate by changing his/her ways.
- Responses to folk sayings of the day.
- Throughout the book, there are periods of time where Ezekiel is left stupefied, unable to speak.
- As we have seen in other prophets, there is general destruction for the Jewish people, with a righteous remnant surviving.
- In the future, God will make it so that the people of Israel will follow God loyally, seemingly changing their very nature.

Outline Of Ezekiel

This outline is based on the JPS Haftorah Commentary Book

- Chapter 1-24: Prophecies of doom
 - Chapters 1-3: Opening visions.
 - Chapters 4-7: Symbolic acts and oracles.²⁵⁶
 - Chapters 8-11: Visions of abominations in the Temple.
 - Chapters 12-14: Assorted condemnations.
 - Chapters 15-19: Allegories and teachings of judgment
 - Chapters 20-24: Final teachings and oracles.
- Chapters 25-32: Prophecies against other nations.
 - Chapter 25: Israel's neighbors.
 - 25:1-7: Amon
 - 25:8-11: Moab
 - 25:12-14: Edom
 - 25:15-17: Philistines
 - 26-28:19: Tyre
 - 28:20-23: Sidon
 - 28:24-26: Epilogue
 - Chapters 29-32: Egypt
- 33 Chapters 33 Miscellaneous items from before and after the fall of Jerusalem.
- Chapter 34-48 Prophecies of consolation.
 - Chapter 33: The renewal of Ezekiel's mission.
 - Chapters 34-36: Assorted oracles of hope/consolation.
 - Chapters 37: Visions of reunification and rebuilding.
 - Chapter 38-39: Vision of apocalyptic war with Gog.
 - Chapters 40-48: Visions of the New Temple.

²⁵⁶ Arguably, the end of Chapter 3 (3:22 -27) belongs in the next section of symbolic acts.

A review of the contents of Ezekiel:

Chapter 1-24: Prophecies of doom

- Chapters 1-3: Opening visions.
 - Chapter 1 begins with an introduction, where Ezekiel says that he was in exile and dating his vision to the fifth year of that exile. The balance of Chapter 1 is a strange vision (allegorical, no doubt) which precedes God's call and instructions (Chapter 2). Ezekiel sees a wind coming from the north along with clouds and fire. Within this storm he sees four beings, humanlike but with four faces (human, lion, ox, and snake) and four wings.²⁵⁷ Each creature has a wheel on the ground next to it. Ezekiel describes hearing the sound of their wings. Beyond these creatures Ezekiel sees a throne with a radiant human form on it. "Like the appearance of a (rain)bow which is in a cloud on a day of rain, such was the appearance of the radiance around Him, the appearance of the form of the LORD's glory, and I saw and fell on my face, and heard a voice speaking." (1:28, God's words are the next verse, 2:1). God tells Ezekiel (whom God refers to as **בָּנֵי אָדָם** – *Son of man/human*) to stand, and a wind picks Ezekiel up onto his feet. God informs Ezekiel that he is sending Ezekiel to prophecy to "the Children of Israel, to the nation that rebels, who rebelled against me – they and their fathers sinned against me up to this day." (2:3) God tells Ezekiel not to fear the people, and only to report God's words.²⁵⁸ Ezekiel sees a hand stretched out to him unfurling a scroll with "lamentations, dirges and woes" (trans per JPS) which God tells him to eat (it tastes sweet). God tells Ezekiel to go speak God's words to the people, although they will not listen, for they are "strong willed and stubborn hearted." (3:7) But God will make Ezekiel of equally strong will. "And a wind picked me up and I heard behind me a great noise: 'Blessed be the LORD's Glory from its place.'"²⁵⁹ Ezekiel is carried off a by a wind to Tel Aviv (a town in Babylonia by the Kevar Canal) where he sits amongst the people stupefied for seven days. In 3:16-21 God speaks to Ezekiel about the consequences of his following his assignment. If he does not prophecy to the evildoer, or if a righteous person becomes an evildoer, the person will be punished for his evil, but God will "seek out his blood" from Ezekiel. On the other hand, if Ezekiel's prophecies can keep a righteous person in line, Ezekiel will be responsible for that person's survival.²⁶⁰
- Chapters 4-7: Symbolic acts and oracles.
 - I would argue that this section effectively begins with 3:22 and following, where Ezekiel is told by God to go out to a valley, where Ezekiel sees an appearance of God which he describes as similar to his previous vision. Ezekiel is told to shut himself in his house where he will lose the power of speech and will not rebuke the people "for they are a house of rebellion" (3:26).

²⁵⁷ See Chapter 10 below, where we learn that these beings are called Cherubs.

²⁵⁸ Recall that in Jeremiah's call narrative, God tells Jeremiah not to fear reprisal for reporting God's words.

²⁵⁹ 3:12. This verse is a mainstay of the *Kedushah*. See above "Additions to the Repetition of the Amidah (Kedushah, Rabbi's Modim, Priestly Blessing)" p. 23.

²⁶⁰ This theme is repeated in Ezekiel 33:1-10. See below page 119 text accompanying footnote 307.

- In Chapter 4 Ezekiel is instructed to do a number of acts as symbols of the impending siege of Jerusalem and exile of the people. These include making an etching on a brick depicting Jerusalem under siege and placing a metal plate as “as an iron wall between you and the city.” Ezekiel is also to lie on his side for a number of days symbolic of the years that Israel and Judah will be punished (the exact symbolism is unclear). He is to eat food (including excrement) as a symbol of the “scraping the bottom of the barrel” that people will have to do (he objects that he has never eaten profane food, and God gives him the allowance of eating cow rather than human excrement).
- In Chapter 5 Ezekiel is instructed to take a knife and cut off his hair (a symbol of life and vitality). One third of the hair he is to be burned, one third to be cut up with a knife, while the rest is to be scattered to the wind and Ezekiel is to draw a sword at it. This is followed by a formulaic announcement typical of Ezekiel. It opens with “**כֹּה אָמַר אֱלֹהִים** Thus Said the LORD God,” (5:5) and God says that the people have disobeyed God, “. . . **לَكُון כֹּה אָמַר אֱלֹהִים ה' יְהוָה** Therefore, thus Said the LORD God, because . . .” (5:7) the people did not follow God, they will be judged. “**לَكְנָהוּתֵיכֶם תְּאכִל בָּנָיֶיכֶם וְבָנָיֶיךָ תְּאכִל בָּנָיֶיכֶם** therefore Fathers will eat children within your midst, and children will eat fathers.” (5:10). A third of the people will die by pestilence or famine, one third will be killed by sword, and one third “I will scatter to the winds and I will draw a sword after them.” (5:12).
- In chapter 6 Ezekiel is told to face the mountains of Israel and prophecy how the sword will be brought onto the mountains to destroy the altars of idolatry on them. Cities will be destroyed and the majority will perish. “And your remnant will remember me among the nations where they are in captivity, that I broke their prostituting hearts which strayed from me, and their eyes that prostituted after their desires . . .” (6:9).
- In 6:11 Ezekiel is told to clap his hands²⁶¹ and stomp his feet and say “Ah, for all the evil abominations of the House of Israel, who will fall by the sword, famine, and pestilence.” In Chapter 7 God tells Ezekiel that “the end has come upon the four corners of the land.” God will not be merciful, instead punishing the people for their wrongdoing, “and they will know that I am the LORD who punished.” (7:9) “The sword is outside, and pestilence and famine are inside. Who is in the field will die by the sword, and who is in the city starvation and pestilence will devour him.” (7:15) People’s money will be unable to save them “in the day of God’s wrath – it will not satisfy their souls, and their intestines will not be filled, for their iniquity will be a stumbling block.” (7:19)
- Chapters 8-11: Visions of abominations in the Temple. Chapter 8 dates itself to the fifth day of the sixth month of the sixth year²⁶² with Ezekiel sitting with the elders of Judah,²⁶³ and “the hand of God fell upon me.” Ezekiel has a vision which carries him off to Jerusalem, where he sees “the infuriating image (i.e. idol).” Ezekiel is also shown a wall

²⁶¹ **וַיַּחֲרֵךְ אֶפְבָּלָק אֶל** Clapping hands is a symbol of anger in the Bible. See e.g. Numbers 24:10: “**וַיַּחֲרֵךְ אֶפְבָּלָק אֶל בְּלָעָם וַיַּסֶּפֶק אֶת כְּפָיו.** . . . And Balak was enraged at Bilam and clapped his hands . . .”

²⁶² Approximately a year after chapter 1, ca. 591 BCE.

²⁶³ This scene demonstrates that Ezekiel enjoyed an elite social status.

with all sorts of symbols engraved on it. “And (God) said, ‘Have you seen, son of man, what the elders of Israel do in darkness, each person in his covered room, for they say ‘The LORD does not see us, the LORD abandoned the land.’’’ (8:12) I.e. due to their defeats and subjugation to Egypt and Babylonia (itself viewed as God’s response to the peoples’ failures), people have given up hope in God’s power and have turned to idols. God tells Ezekiel “You will still see worse abominations.” (8:13, but also in 8:15). In 8:14 Ezekiel is shown women at the entrance to the Temple crying over Tamuz.²⁶⁴ In 8:16 Ezekiel is shown people in the inner court bowing towards the sun. 8:17-18 is God’s promise of destruction. In Chapter 9, God calls out for “those in charge of the city, each with his tools of destruction.” Six men appear, each holding a club. God tells Ezekiel to go out into the city and put a mark on the forehead of anyone who is found lamenting the abominations being done in Jerusalem. God tells the other men to go and mercilessly kill everyone in the city besides those marked by Ezekiel. While they are out killing and Ezekiel is alone, Ezekiel, “fell on my face and cried out and said ‘Aha, my LORD God, do you destroy the entire remnant of Israel in your pouring out your wrath upon Jerusalem?’” (9:8) God responds, “The sins of the House of Israel and Judah are exceedingly great, and the earth is filled with blood, and the city is full of corruption, for they say ‘The LORD abandoned the land, The LORD does not see,’²⁶⁵ my eyes will also not be merciful and will not have pity . . . ” (9:9-10) The leader of the six men of destruction returned with the message “I have done as you commanded.” Subsequently (Chapter 10) the man is instructed to take coals from beneath a Cherub and spread them around the city. In 9:3 there was a passing reference to the image of God resting on the a cherub (i.e. coals from God’s throne are used to set the city ablaze). This was the first reference to a cherub (a certain angelic being) in the book of Ezekiel. The balance of Chapter 10 describes the Cherub more, and makes it clear that they are the same creatures that Ezekiel saw in his first vision. In 10:18 “The glory of God left from upon the platform of the Temple and stood upon the Cherubs. In Chapter 11, a spirit carries Ezekiel off to the eastward gate of the Temple, where he sees a bunch of people (including two leaders, Ya’azniyah and Pelatyahu”. God describes these people to Ezekiel as those who plot wickedness, etc, and God bids Ezekiel to prophecy to them. A spirit falls upon Ezekiel and tells him to say “Thus says the LORD . . . I know what comes to your minds . . . Therefore, thus says the LORD God . . . You will fall by the sword, upon the border of Israel I will strike you, and you will known that I am the LORD . . . And you will know that I am the LORD by whose laws you did not go, and by whose rules you did not do, and according the rules of the nations around you you have acted.” (11:7, 10, 12). As Ezekiel preaches, Pelatyahu dies. Ezekiel says he “fell on my face and cried in a loud voice and said ‘Aha, my LORD God, do you destroy the entire remnant of Israel?’²⁶⁶ God responds that the people who were exiled with him would eventually return to the land, “ . . . and I will gather you from the lands where you are dispersed to, and will give you the land of Israel. And you will go there and remove all the disgusting things and all the abominations from it. And I will give to them a single heart, and a new spirit I will place within them, and I will remove the

²⁶⁴ Tamuz is a Babylonian God. The Jewish calendar has the names of its months from the Babylonians, which explains why Tamuz is in there.

²⁶⁵ Recall a similar statement in 8:12.

²⁶⁶ A question vaguely familiar from 9:8.

heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh. So that they may follow my laws and observe my rules and do them, and be for me a nation and I will be for them a God.”²⁶⁷ (11:17-20) At the end of the chapter, the Cherubim rise with the glory of God on them, and the glory of God leaves the Temple mount and goes to a mountain to the East of the city.²⁶⁸ A spirit lifts up Ezekiel and transports him back to Babylonia, “and the vision that was before me went off of me, and I told the exiles all the things that God had shown me.”

- Chapters 12-14: Assorted condemnations.

- In 12:1-16, Ezekiel tells us that God told him to pack his bags and leave as if he were going off into exile, with his eyes covered so he can't see the land. Ezekiel is instructed to tell people that he is acting as a portent for what will happen to the people, particularly “the prince” who will try to escape but will be captured and brought to Babylonia, where he will die, although he will not see Babylonia. The reference is to Tzidkiyahu, who during the final demise of Jerusalem attempts to escape, but the Babylonians catch up to him and bring him to Nevuchadnezar, who gouges his eyes out.²⁶⁹ “And they will know that I am the LORD through my dispersing them among the nations . . .” 12:15.
- In 12:17 Ezekiel is told to eat and drink with anxiety (i.e. shaking), symbolic of the troubles that will beset the people.
- In 12:21-25 God responds to an apparently common proverb, “The days will be many and the visions will be for naught” (i.e. that the negative prophecies that the people will be exiled will not come to pass). “. . . לֹכַן כֵּה אָמַר אֱלֹהִים Therefore, thus Said the LORD God. . .” there will be a time where this proverb won’t be said, because the prophecies will come to pass. Similarly, in v. 26-28 God responds to those who say that the fulfillment of prophecies is far off, by saying that prophecies will now be fulfilled without delay.
- Chapter 13: About false prophets. Ezekiel tells us that God instructed him to speak to the (false) prophets who “who prophecy from their hearts.” “Like jackals in ruins are your prophets, Israel” (13:4). These false prophets will be cut off from the people, and will not return to the land (presumably this means they will not have progeny who can return to Israel in the future). “. . . וְיַעֲשֶׂנּוּ Because and because they misled my nation saying ‘shalom’ and there is no *shalom* . . .” (13:10). Interestingly, 13:17 and following focuses attention particularly on female false prophets. General destruction is predicted, as well as God’s “saving my people” from the false prophets (13:21).
- In chapter 14 Ezekiel is approached by some elders (presumably for advice). God tells Ezekiel to tell them that when evildoers approach a prophet, God will respond directly for all of their evils (i.e. with punishment). The prophet who responds to their inquiries (presumably with falsely soothing prophecies) will also be punished.
- In 14:12-23 God tells Ezekiel that a land where the people sin will be stricken with famine and made empty from humans and animals. “Were these three people in its

²⁶⁷ This phrase is a common phrase in the prophets. See above footnote 233.

²⁶⁸ Ezekiel will have a vision of God’s glory returning to the Temple along this same path in chapter 43.

²⁶⁹ See further on 2 Kings 25. above p.70 and Jeremiah 39, above p. 100.

midst, Noah, Daniel and Job; (only) they through their righteousness would their souls be saved . . ." (14:14)²⁷⁰.

- Chapters 15-19: Allegories and teachings of judgment
 - Chapter 15 compares the Jewish people to wood from the grapevine, which is fairly useless as compared to wood from a tree. When it is burned, it remains useless. Just as that wood is assigned for burning, so are the people of Jerusalem assigned for destruction.
 - In Chapter 16²⁷¹ God tells Ezekiel to preach to the people of Jerusalem comparing them to an infant abandoned at birth and "And I passed over you and saw you wallowing in your blood, and I said to you, 'through your blood you shall live', and I said to you, 'through your blood you shall live.'²⁷² I have made you grow like the plants of the field, and you grew and got big and became wormwood your breasts became firm and your hair sprouted, and you were naked and bare."²⁷³ (16:6-7) When Israel grew up and God saw "your time for love had arrived," God covered her nakedness, gave her jewelry, bathed her and anointed her with oil. "And I entered into a covenant with you, declares the LORD God, and you became mine." (16:8) "Your fame spread among the nations through your beauty . . ." (16:14) "But confident in your beauty you prostituted yourself (i.e. committed adultery) (16:15). They took the jewelry that they were given and made idols (16:17). They took the oil and food they were given and used it as incense to other gods. They took the sons and daughters they were given and sacrificed them to other gods. Because of their misdeeds, God will assemble all of Israel's lovers (i.e. the nations who worship the gods that Israel went after) and they will "destroy your loftiness, and level your mounds, and strip you of your clothes and take your jewelry and leave you naked and bare." (16:39) "I will satisfy my rage with you, and my being jealous²⁷⁴ of you will depart, and I will be calm and be angry no more." (16:42) Those who use proverbs will say that Israel is just like its sister nations. However, Judea is even worse. "As I live, declares the LORD God, that your sister Sodom and her daughters did not do as you and your daughters did. This was the sin of Sodom your sister: arrogance. I gave

²⁷⁰ The reference here is to three legendary figures of righteousness. The reference is not to the prophet Daniel, but to a different mythic figure of righteousness, known also in Phoenician legend. See Encyclopedia Judaica "Daniel."

²⁷¹ See chapter 23 for some themes that are very similar to chapter 16.

²⁷² Alternatively, "In spite of your blood."

²⁷³ These two verses are found in the Passover Hagadah as a prooftext for Deuteronomy 26:5 saying that in Egypt "there you became a great nation." It is really the second verse "I have made you . . ." that proves the point of the verse in Deuteronomy. The first verse "I said to you . . ." is added to the Hagadah after the first verse, perhaps because the reference to blood was associated with the blood of the Passover offering (though other interpretations take this blood as a reference to circumcision).

²⁷⁴ Throughout the Bible, God is often anthropomorphized as being "jealous," i.e. wanting the exclusive loyalty of the people. See e.g. Ex. 20:4 (from the ten commandments "Do not bow to them (other gods) and do not worship them, because I the LORD your God am a jealous God, who visits the sins of parents upon children for the third and fourth (generation) for those who scorn me."), 34:14, Deut. 4:24, 5:8, 6:15.

her her fill of bread and tranquil quiet was hers and to her sister, but she did not strengthen the hand of the poor and destitute. They were arrogant and did abominations before me and I removed them as I saw fit. And Shomron (Samaria)²⁷⁵ did not sin half of your sins, and you did more abominations than they, and you made your sister righteous through all the sins that you did" (16:48-51). God will restore Sodom and Shomron, and the Jews' fortunes will improve with theirs. "And I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and will make for you an everlasting covenant." (16:60) "And I will make a covenant with you, וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי אָנִי 'הֵן and you will know that I am the LORD." (16:62).

- Chapter 17 presents an elaborate metaphor of Tzidkiyah's disloyalty to Babylonia, but also of the Jewish people's disloyalty to God. The metaphor is set up in 17:1-10, describing an eagle who plucks the top of a cedar tree in Lebanon²⁷⁶ and took it to "the land of traders" (=Babylonia) where it grew into a lowly vine. But the vine turns towards another eagle hoping for more water to help it grow into a more majestic vine. God explains this metaphor in the balance of the chapter. The King of Babylonia came to Jerusalem and took its King and leaders (a reference to the exile of Yehoyachin²⁷⁷). Babylonia took from "the seed of the King" and made a covenant with him to make him a lowly king (a reference to Nevuchadnezar's setting up Tzidkiyah as King, see the section on the fall of Jerusalem, 2 Kings 23:31-25:21 above at p. 70). But this King rebelled by sending representatives to Egypt. The perpetrator of this disloyalty will die in Babylonia. Pharaoh will not provide the support he expects. "לְכָن כִּי אָמַר אֶל-צִדְקִיָּהוּ הָאֱלֹהִים Therefore, thus said the LORD God. As I live, I will place upon his head my promise which he ignored and my covenant which he broke, And I will spread over him my net . . . and bring him to Babylonia and you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken." (17:19-21). The balance of the chapter carries the metaphor into a more positive future, ". . . I will take a tip of the cedar . . . and I will send it to a tall mountain . . . upon a tall mountain in Israel I will plant it and it will sprout branches and make fruit and will become a majestic cedar . . . and all the trees of the field will know that I, the LORD, make a high tree low, and uplift a low tree, I make a lush tree dry, and cause a dry tree to flower, I the LORD have spoken and shall act." (17:22-24)
- Chapter 18 features the famed response to the folk-saying, "The fathers ate sour grapes, and the teeth of the sons were set on edge."²⁷⁸ This is a response to the idea that later generations are punished for the sins of earlier generations.²⁷⁹ God vows that there will no longer be people in Israel who say such things. There are two main

²⁷⁵ Samaria was the capital of the Northern Kingdom (AKA "Israel" to the Southern Kingdom called "Judah").

²⁷⁶ Lebanon was known for its great cedar trees.

²⁷⁷ See above p. 104 text accompanying footnote 253.

²⁷⁸ Note that this common folk belief is also expressed in Jeremiah 31:29.

²⁷⁹ פְּקֻדָּעַן אֲבוֹת עַל בָּנִים וְעַל בָּנִי בָּנִים עַל שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל רְבָעִים . . . who visits the sins of fathers upon sons and upon sons of sons to the third and fourth (generation). Compare Deut. 24:16, "Fathers shall not die for (the sins of) their sons, nor shall sons die for (the sins of) their fathers, each person shall die in his own sins."

messages in this chapter: That each person's destiny is determined by their own actions, and that if one changes their behavior (for better or worse), they will be treated differently. "All souls are mine, the soul of the father just like the soul of the sons are mine – the soul that sins is the one that shall die." (18:4) He who does good will live.²⁸⁰ If his son does evil, his son will die. If that evil son has a righteous son, that son will not die for the sins of his father. The soul that sins shall die; the son will not carry the iniquity of the father, and the father will not carry the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the evil of the evildoer shall be upon him." (18:20) On the other hand, an evildoer who repents from his evil will live. "All his transgressions which he did will not be remembered against him, because of his righteousness that he did he shall live. Do I prefer the death of the evildoer, declares the LORD God, is it not (that I prefer) that he return from his ways and live." (18:22-23) Also, if a righteous person becomes evil, their previous good will be forgotten as well. The people say that God's ways are not fair, but God responds that it is their ways that are unfair. (18:25)²⁸¹

- In Chapter 19, Ezekiel is told to pronounce a dirge in which Israel is told that its mother was a lioness, whose cub became a great beast devouring people. People hunted the cub and dragged him off to Egypt. This is a metaphor for King Yehoachaz, who was deposed by Pharaoh Necho shortly after ascending the throne (see 2 Kings 23:31-35).²⁸² The mother sets up another of her cubs as a great beast, but he is carried off to Babylon (it would seem this is a reference to Yehoyahchin²⁸³). The dirge also says that Israel's mother is a vine which grows well due to an abundance of water. She holds a scepter, but she was thrown to the ground and her scepter is consumed by fire. She is now planted in the desert. Per Rabbi Joseph Kara²⁸⁴, this is a metaphor for Yehoyahchin's mother, who was part of the Yehoyahchin exile (2 Kings 24:12, 15).
- Chapters 20-24: Final teachings and oracles.

²⁸⁰ The description of good living (18:5-9) is quite beautiful and merits at least a footnote. "He who is righteous and does justice and righteousness – who has not eaten on the mountains (i.e. meat of sacrifices of idolatry) and has not lifted his eyes to the idols of Israel, and who has not defiled the wife of his fellow nor approached a menstrual woman. Who does not oppress, who returns a debtor's pledge (a reference to returning a security item should the person need it for warmth at night, see Deut 24:13), who does not steal, who gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with clothing. He does not give (a loan) with interest, and does not take interest, who keeps his hand from evil and does true justice between people. Who follows my laws and keeps my commandments to act faithfully, he is righteous and shall live, declares the LORD God." (18:5-9)

²⁸¹ Note much of the themes of Chapter 18 are repeated in 33:10-20. The discomfort that people felt with God's system of repentance is most eloquently evidenced in the Book of Jonah, discussed below beginning on p. 142, where Jonah attempts to flee from God's mission for fear that the people of Nineveh would repent and be absolved of punishment for their evil ways.

²⁸² Rashi on 19:3, Encyclopedia Judaica "Yehoahaz,"

²⁸³ See Rabbi David Kimchi on 19:9, who suggests the metaphor applies to Yehoyahchin or Tzidkiyahu. On the Yehoyahchin exile, see above p. 104 text accompanying footnote 253.

²⁸⁴ Mahari Kara on 19:10.

▪ In Chapter 20, the elders of Israel come to Ezekiel “to seek out the LORD.” Based on the rest of the chapter, some scholars speculate that the elders were asking Ezekiel to begin doing sacrifices in Babylonia.²⁸⁵ God tells Ezekiel “I will not be sought out,” i.e. God will not respond to their search. God says that when God took the people out of Egypt, God told them “cast away the detestable things of his eyes and the disgustingness of Egypt (i.e. idolatry) and do not be defiled, for I am the LORD your God” (20:7). But the people rebelled (seemingly while still in Egypt) and did not cast away these negative influences, and God wanted to destroy them. “But I did for my own names sake, so that I not be profaned in the eyes of the nations in whose midst they were, to whom I became known before their eyes to take them out of the land of Egypt.”²⁸⁶ So instead, God took the people out and taught them “my laws (*chukotai*) and statutes (*mishpatai*) that a man may follow and live by them.”²⁸⁷ God also gave them “my Sabbaths to be a sign between you and me to know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.”²⁸⁸ The people in the Sinai wilderness were rebellious and did not listen to God. God again did not destroy them because that would reflect negatively on God, but God decided not to bring that group of people into the land of Israel, “**יְהוָה** Because they distained my statutes and did not follow my laws, and my Sabbaths they desecrated because their hearts go after their disgustingness.” (20:16) God told the children of that generation to not follow their fathers’ ways, but to follow God’s ways, but they too rebelled. Again, God did not destroy them before the other nations. God asks rhetorically, “Shall I be sought out (i.e. found) for you oh House of Israel, as I live, declares the LORD God, I shall not be sought out by you.” (20:31) Instead, “. . . with a strong hand and an outstretched arm and with poured

²⁸⁵ See Encyclopedia Judaica, “Ezekiel.”

²⁸⁶ The idea that God’s destroying Israel would reflect poorly on God is most eloquently expressed by Moses in pleading for God not to destroy the people after the sin of the Golden calf. See Exodus 32:11-12, “Moses implored before the LORD his God and said ‘Why, Lord, shall your fury be enraged (*yichar apecha*) with your people that you took out of the land of Egypt with a great might and a strong hand. Why should Egypt say, ‘with evil intent [God] took them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from upon the earth’ . . . ’” and Deuteronomy 9:28, “Lest the land out of which you took us say, ‘it is because the Lord could not bring them to the land which he promised to them, and because of His hatred of them, he took them out to (of Egypt) to kill them in the dessert.’” Another example of a similar plea is Joel 2:17, see below p.134 text accompanying footnote 378. On the idea that God will reconcile with the Jewish people in order to insure that people see that God is the real God, see other references in footnote 314, p.121. On Israel, in its defeat, being taunted with the question, “Where is your God, see e.g. Micah 7:10, p. 149, text accompanying footnote 149.

²⁸⁷ 10:11. The idea of the Torah being laws “to live by,” is found throughout the bible. The verbiage here is quite reminiscent of Lev. 18:5, “You shall keep my laws (*chukotai*) and my statutes (*mishpatai*) that a man can do them and live by them, I am the LORD.”

²⁸⁸ This verse reminds us of a number of times in the Torah that God describes Godself as Israel’s sanctifier, e.g. Ex. 31:13, Lev. 20:8, 21:8, 22:32, and 26:31. The verse’s statement that the Sabbath is a sign between God and the Israelites of course calls to mind the words of *veshameru*, Ex. 31:17.

out wrath I shall reign upon you.” (20:33-34).²⁸⁹ God will gather the Jewish people into the wilderness as before, and will remove all the sinners.²⁹⁰ Those remaining will go to Israel. “For upon my holy mount, upon the high mount of Israel, declares the LORD God, there shall the entire House of Israel worship me, there shall I accept them and there shall I seek out their contributions and their choice offerings of all your sacred things.” (20:40)

- Chapter 21 contains a number of oracles of destruction of Jerusalem, including God setting God’s fire against them and burning everything, and God drawing God’s sword against them and wiping out “the righteous and the wicked” (21:8). “And all flesh will know that I, the LORD drew my sword from its sheath, not to return again (to the sheath).” (21:10) Ezekiel is also told to take symbolic actions and “sigh with the breaking of loins (per the Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old testament, “i.e. in entire collapse of strength.”) (21:11), explaining to the people that this is over the tidings that have come, and to clap “hand against hand,” as God would “clap my hand against my hand and assuage my anger,” (21:22) We are also given a picture of Nevuchadnezar coming up to Jerusalem with all his omens to help him, and saying that although the Babylonians (referred to as Amonites) are a tool of destruction, they too would be destroyed.²⁹¹
- In Chapter 22 God bids Ezekiel to arraign “the City of Blood” (i.e. Jerusalem) and tell her of all her abominations. Ezekiel is to tell Jerusalem that she has sinned through the blood she has spilled and has been defiled through her idolatry. “The princes of Israel – each used his strength within you in order to spill blood. Mother and father were humiliated within you, to the stranger they acted cheatingly within you, the orphan and widow they oppressed with in you. You denigrated my Sanctuary and desecrated my Sabbaths.” (22:7-8) The list of sins is quite exhaustive, including also incest, rape, adultery. Utter destruction is predicted. God describes how Jerusalem’s (false) profits are like lions ripping up their prey, how the Priests have profaned God’s Torah, and profaned God’s Temple.
- Chapter 23²⁹² draws a parable of two sisters, Ohala (i.e. “tent,”) identified as standing for Samaria, capital of the Northern, Kingdom) and Ohalibah (i.e. “my tent is within her,”) identified as standing for Jerusalem. Both committed harlotry while in Egypt. Ohala whorred “while she was mine,” and lusted after her Assyrian lovers, even

²⁸⁹ This phrasing, of course, immediately calls to mind the “mighty hand and outstretched arm” with which God took the Israelites out of Egypt, see e.g. Deut. 5:14.

²⁹⁰ The idea of God taking the Jews back to the dessert in order to renew their relationship with God is also found in Hosea 2:16, see below p. 130, text accompanying footnote 350 (though interpretations of that verse vary).

²⁹¹ There is a recurring concept in the Bible that God uses evil empires as tools of God’s destruction of other evildoers. See also Isaiah 10, discussed above at p. 74, and the introduction to Habakuk, below at p. 151. In fact, Deuteronomy sees the Israelite conquest of Canaan as a tool of God’s punishment for evildoers, “Do not speak in your heart when God destroys them from before you, ‘Because of my righteousness the LORD brought me to inherit this land,’ – it is because of the evil of these nations the LORD dispossesses them (of the land) before you.” (Deut 9:4)

²⁹² See chapter 16 for some themes that are very similar to chapter 16.

while not abandoning her relationship with Egypt. “Therefore I gave her over to the hand of her lover, for whom she lusted” (23:9) who exposed her and killed her children by sword.²⁹³ Although her sister Ohalibah saw what happened to Ohala, she went and did even worse, lustng also after the Babylonians (Chaldeans). “Therefore, Ohalivah, thus says the LORD God . . . “ God will get her lovers angry with her, and they will all attack her. “You will walk in the path of your sister, and I will put her cup in your hand.” (23:31) “Therefore, thus says the LORD God, because you forgot me and cast me behind your back, you too shall carry your wickedness and your harlotry.” (23:35) In 23:36 Ezekiel is told to arraign Oholah (similar to the open of Chapter 22), referencing their adultery & bloodshed, as well as their slaughtering their children to gods, etc, and promising their destruction.

- Chapter 24 presents a prophecy received by Ezekiel on the 10th day tenth month of the “ninth year,” telling him to record this date as the day that the Babylonian King (Nevuchadnezar) besieged Jerusalem.²⁹⁴ Ezekiel is instructed “And give a parable to the house of rebellion saying upon them, thus says the LORD God: . . . ” (24:3) The parable has the narrative voice instructing that a caldron be prepared and heated, essentially predicting Jerusalem’s destruction by fire. Ezekiel is then told (v. 15 and following) that God will “remove the joy of your eyes,” but that Ezekiel is not to mourn or cry: “Mourn softly, but do not mourn the dead, wear your ornaments and place your sandals on your feet, do not cover your upper lip, and eat not the bread of men (i.e. bread that would be given to a mourner as part of comforting the mourner) (24:17).²⁹⁵ Ezekiel’s wife dies, but Ezekiel goes on following God’s instructions. Ezekiel is asked the meaning of his actions (or lack of action), and he explains that the Holy Temple will be destroyed, but that the people will not be able to mourn for it (presumably out of shock), and will just moan to one another. On the day of

²⁹³ This is a reference to the demise of the Northern Kingdom at the hands of the Assyrians, which we discussed in 2 Kings 17, see above p. 68.

²⁹⁴ Jeremiah 52:4ff, (see above footnote 250 and accompanying text) identifies the tenth day of the tenth month of the 9th year of King Tzidkiyahu’s reign as the date of the siege of Jerusalem. The same date is identified in 2 Kings 25:1-2.

²⁹⁵ In the Talmud, this verse is sited as a basis for certain mourning practices. Ezekiel is told to “groan quietly,” which is taken to demonstrate that a mourner does not engage in “*she’aylat shalom*,” (literally asking how another is doing, but probably generally referring to extending pleasantries). After this phrase, Ezekiel is told not to “mourn,” and so the Talmud argues that the things Ezekiel is then told not to do indicate practices that mourners in general would do. Hence, “Wear your ornaments” demonstrates that tefillin should not be worn by a mourner (though this rule is only applied to the first day of mourning), “do not cover your upper lip,” demonstrates that a mourner does a head-wrap (a practice no longer followed), and “place your sandals on your feet,” demonstrates that a mourner generally does not wear shoes, and “eat not the bread of men” demonstrates that people in mourning would be brought bread to eat (generally, this would be done for the meal immediately following the burial). See BT Moed Kattan 15a-b and 27b.

destruction, however, Ezekiel will get messengers telling him about what has happened, and his mouth will be opened²⁹⁶ so that he will be a portent for them.

- Chapters 25-32 Prophecies against other nations.
 - Chapter 25-28: Israel's Neighbors. As indicated in the epilogue, the destruction of Israel's neighbors is a prelude to Israel's restoration.
 - 25:1-7: Prophecy against Amon: Amon is to be punished for their contempt towards Israel: “... פֶּה אָמַר אֱלֹהִים בְּנֵי הָעָם because you have said ‘Aha!’ regarding my sanctuary being desecrated and regarding the land of Israel being destroyed and toward the house of Judah which has gone to exile, לְכֹן therefore Behold I am giving you to the Kedemites²⁹⁷ as a possession . . . וַיֹּאמֶר and you will know that I am the LORD.” (25:3-5)
 - 25:8-11: Prophecy against Moab: Because Moab said “Behold, the House of Judah is like all the nations” (presumably i.e. in that they met the fate of destruction), Moab will be handed over to the Kedemites along with Amon. “. . . So that the children of Amon shall no longer be mentioned among the nations. And with Moab I shall execute judgment and they will know that I am the LORD.” (25:10-11)
 - 25:12-14 Prophecy against Edom: Edom will be destroyed, and Gods wrath poured out on it, because it took revenge on Israel.²⁹⁸
 - 25:15-17 Prophecy against the Philistines: The Philistines will be utterly destroyed for their acting vengefully.
 - 26:1-28:19 Prophecy against Tyre (Phoenicia): Tyre will be destroyed because it gloated at Jerusalem's destruction. God will hurl numerous enemies at Tyre. Nevuchadnezar will come with massive numbers of troops and equipment. They will be destroyed and looted. Chapter 27 is quite poetic, as it describes the splendor of Tyre and the many countries that traded with it. God says of Tyre, “. . . Tyre, you said ‘I am the perfect beauty.’” (27:3) Her harbor was filled with ships. Everyone and everything associated with Tyre will go down at its downfall. People will wail over its destruction. Much of chapter 27 sees Tyre as a majestic boat, which will sink into the sea with all hands lost. “They will raise up [voice] in intoning a dirge, and bemoan for you saying]: ‘who was like Tyre in its being silenced in the midst of the sea.’” (27:32) Chapter 28 speaks of Tyre's haughtiness, seeing itself as a god. “Since you are so haughty of heart and you said ‘I am god,’ I sit on the throne of God in the heart of the sea, but you are humans and not God, though you think of your wisdom as the wisdom of God” (28:2) Therefore, strangers will come and destroy her. 28:11 starts a new prophecy saying Tyre was “in the Eden Garden of God,” (28:12) having all

²⁹⁶ In fact, this messenger is described as coming in 33:21, and in 33:22 we are told that God opens Ezekiel's mouth. EJ (“Ezekiel”) comments: “The arrival of the fugitive with news of Jerusalem's fall brings an end to the prophet's dumbness—to what effect, remains obscure.”

²⁹⁷ A designation of those dwelling East of Syria and Palestine, per EJ “Kedemites.”

²⁹⁸ See Ezekiel 35:5, 10 indicating that Edom took the defeat of Judah as an opportunity to take some of Judah's territory and Ovadiah 1:10-16 indicating Edom's participation in the destruction of Jerusalem.

- precious materials. “You were pure in your ways from the day of your creation, until sin was found in you.” (28:15) Therefore they will be struck down.²⁹⁹
- 28:20-23: Prophecy against Sidon: Ezekiel is to prophecy to Sidon that God “will be glorified in your midst and you will know that I am the LORD in my executing justice, and I will be sanctified through her (28:22).
 - 28:24-26: Epilogue: The final verses of Chapter 28 speak of how Israel will no longer have its neighboring nations as a thorn in its side. When God gathers the House of Israel into its land, “They will dwell upon her securely and build houses and plant vineyards and will dwell securely when I execute judgment upon all who despise them surrounding them, וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כִּי אָנֹכִי הָאֱלֹהִים and they will know that I am the LORD.”
 - Chapters 29-32: Prophecies against Egypt. These chapters contain seven prophecies against Egypt.
 - Chapter 29 (dated to the 10th year, 10th month, 12th day) is directed to Pharaoh, who is also referred to here as “the great *tanin* (serpent),”³⁰⁰ who claims “My river (the Nile) is mine and I created it.” (29:3) God will put a hook in Pharaoh’s jaws and pull him up from his river.³⁰¹ He and all the “fish of his sea” will be cast upon the field, not to be gathered or buried, instead given to be eaten by the animals of the land and the birds of the sky.³⁰² And all inhabitants of Egypt will know that I am the LORD . . .” (29:5-6) “ . . . Therefore, thus Said the LORD God” (29:8) God will bring the sword on Egypt and they will be destroyed. Egypt will be desolate for forty years³⁰³ and then will be restored and will become “a lowly nation,” so that Israel would no longer be able to turn to them for help (29:16).
 - In 29:17 (dated to the 27th year, first month, first day) God tells Ezekiel that Nevuchandnezar had a long, costly, and unsuccessful siege of Trye³⁰⁴, and that Nevuchandnezar’s defeat of Egypt would be his recompense and allow him to pay off the costs of the siege on Tyre. “On that day I will sprout up a horn for Israel (i.e. cause Israel to be built up) and you will be vindicated among them, and you will know that I am the LORD.”
 - In Chapter 30 Ezekiel is told to prophesy regarding a day coming “A day of clouds, and of nations (i.e. nations invading Egypt).” Egypt will be attacked, plundered and razed to the ground.

²⁹⁹ Note that the rumors of Tyres defeat turn out to be somewhat exaggerated. See text accompanying footnote 304.

³⁰⁰ Note that in Exodus 7:8-13, Moses’ rod turns into a serpent (*tannin*) and devours the rods of Pharaoh’s servants (which had also turned into serpents). This episode was likely a play on Pharaoh’s nickname, “The great serpent.”

³⁰¹ There is an allusion here to a mythic battle between God and a primordial sea monster (*tannin*) mentioned in Isaiah 51:9, Ps. 74:13, Job 26:12 (see JPS Bible Commentary on Haftorah for Va’era, Ezekiel 29:4).

³⁰² It seems to me that this verse is reminiscent of the scene following the parting of the Red Sea: “ . . . and Israel saw Egyptians dead on the shore of the sea.” (Exodus 14:30)

³⁰³ The number 40 is typological, and should not be taken literally.

³⁰⁴ Tyre would stand until Alexander the Great defeated it. See EJ on Tyre.

- 30:20 begins a prophecy dated to “the eleventh year on the seventh day of the first month.” Pharaoh’s arm is broken and not treated so that it cannot hold a sword.
“ . . . לְכָנּוּ כִּי הָאָמַר אֶלְךָ נָּא שָׁמֵן הָאֱלֹהִים Therefore, thus Said the LORD God behold I will [come] to Pharaoh King of Egypt and will break his arm, both the strong one and the broken one and I will make the sword fall out of his hand. And I will disperse Egypt among the nations and will scatter them to the lands.” (30:22-23) God will strengthen the arms of the King of Babylonia and Pharaoh’s arms will fall, “And you will know that I am the LORD” (30:25).
- Chapter 31 is dated to the 11th year the third month, the first day. Ezekiel is told to speak to “Pharaoh and his hordes” (31:2) asking who was like Egypt in its grandeur. Assyria was fertile and beautiful, blessed with abundant water and home to all manner of animal. “I made it beautiful in all its branches so that [even] jealous of her were each tree in Eden which is in the Garden of the Lord..” (31:9) “ . . . לְכָנּוּ כִּי הָאָמַר אֶלְךָ נָּא שָׁמֵן הָאֱלֹהִים Therefore, thus Said the LORD God, because . . .” of Assyria’s arrogance God handed it over to “the strongest of nations”³⁰⁵ which destroyed it and cleared it out. (31:10-11) The chapter concludes that this same pattern will carry out with Egypt: “To whom were you comparable in honor and greatness among the trees of Eden, you will be brought down with the trees of Eden to the land to below (i.e. the netherworld), you will sleep with the uncircumcised³⁰⁶, with those slain by sword; He Pharaoh and all his hordes, declares the LORD God.” “ (31:18)
- Chapter 32 is much like Chapter 29. The prophecy is dated to the 12th year, 12th month, first of the month. Ezekiel is instructed to recite a dirge about Pharaoh. Pharaoh (standing for all Egypt) is compared to a serpent (*tannin*, see Chapter 29 above) kicking up (so to speak) dirt and muddying the water. God will cast a net and catch Pharaoh and fling him on the ground so that all manner of animal will eat his flesh. Pharaoh’s blood will water the earth. “All the luminaries of the sky I will darken above you, and I will make darkness on your land, declares the LORD God” (32:8). Egypt will be scattered to the nations. “For thus says the LORD God, the sword of the King of Babylon will be upon you.” (32:11)
- 32:17 begins a prophecy dated 12th year, 15th day (presumably of the 12th month). The prophecy speaks of Egypt going to *sheol* (the netherworld). Assyria is there, “Their graves are placed in the ends of the pit, and her congregation around her tomb, all of them fallen by the sword, who had placed terror in the land of the living.” (32:23) Elam, Meshech and Tubal are all there (each of these groups are described as “uncircumcised” and as having brought terror into the living world.

³⁰⁵ “The Assyrian kingdom was overthrown in 612 B.C.E. and succeeded by the neo-Chaldean kingdom of which the outstanding figure was Nebuchadnezzar” – EJ on Babylonia (Neo-Chaldeans are who we call Babylonians).

³⁰⁶ Note that Egypt practices circumcision. See JPS Haftorah Commentary on First Day of Passover, Joshua 5:9, citing Jack M. Sasson, “Circumcision in the Ancient Near East,” Journal of Biblical Literature 85 (1966): 473-76. Judaism also has a strong taboo against the uncircumcised, see e.g. Gen 34:13-17 (Jacob’s children telling Shechem that they could not have marriage between their claims absent circumcision) and Ex. 12:48 requiring circumcision in order to participate in the Passover sacrifice.

“And you will rest with the uncircumcised, and will rest with the fallen by sword.” (32:28) Edom and the Sidonians are also there (uncircumcised, etc.). “Pharaoh will see them and be consoled for his hordes, Pharaoh’s fallen by sword, declares the LORD God” (32:31).

- Chapters 33 Miscellaneous items from before and after the fall of Jerusalem. Note that much of this chapter recalls themes found earlier in the book (at times almost verbatim). EJ argues that although this chapter is thematically similar to the prophecies of doom in chapters 1-24, it is reasonably placed after the prophecies against the nations because they describe the situation just before the fall of Jerusalem, and thus are later than the material from chapters 1-24.
 - 33:1-10 is reminiscent of 3:16-19. God speaks to Ezekiel allegorically of a nation expecting attack and appointing a watchman. If the watchman blows the shofar (=sounds the alarm) and a person ignores it, then the person has his own blood on his hands. However, if the watchman does not sound the alarm, the watchman has the guilt. Similarly, Ezekiel is Israel’s watchperson. If Ezekiel fails to transmit God’s word, then the evildoer will be punished for his evil, “but I will seek out his blood from you.” However, if Ezekiel does transmit the warning, then the evildoer will die, “but you will have saved your own life.” (33:9)³⁰⁷
 - 33:10-20 calls to mind some of the themes of Chapter 18 (although the people are more contrite in this chapter, not blaming everything on their ancestors). The people are pictured as saying that they have sinned and are being punished so “how can we live.” “Say to them, as I live, declares the LORD God, I do not desire the death of the evildoer but rather the repentance of the evildoer from his ways and live, return, return from your evil ways and why should you die, house of Israel.” One’s fate can change with a change of their behavior. “The (former) righteousness of a (previously) righteous person will not save him on the day of his sin, and the (former) evil of an evildoer will not cause him to stumble on the day of his repentance from his evil . . . ” (33:12) “And the people of your nation say ‘the way of God is not fair,’ but it is their ways that are not fair.” (33:17)
 - 33:21-22 describes the arrival of an exile with news of the fall of Jerusalem. “And the hand of the LORD was upon me in the evening before the arrival of the fugitive and [the hand of the LORD] opened my mouth before [the fugitive] came to me in the morning and opened my mouth and I was no longer speechless.” (33:22)³⁰⁸
 - In 33:23-29 God says the people who remain in the ruins of the land are arguing that since Abraham was one person and inherited the land, they as many people have a right to the land. But the people have done evil and therefore do not have a right to the land. But they, too, will fall by the sword or become food for beasts.
 - 33:30-33, for some reason placed after the description of the fall of Jerusalem, although it clearly represents words of God to Ezekiel before the fall. God tells Ezekiel that those who come to hear his “words of God” are not sincerely listening.

³⁰⁷ This statement on the consequences of Ezekiel’s following God’s instructions (or failure to do so) is quite similar to Ezekiel 3:16-21, described above at page 106, text accompanying footnote 260.

³⁰⁸ Encyclopedia Judaica (“Ezekiel”) comments: “The arrival of the fugitive with news of Jerusalem’s fall brings an end to the prophet’s dumbness—to what effect, remains obscure.”

They still do what they want to do, and they just listen to Ezekiel as if he is an artist. “But it (the happenings predicted by Ezekiel) comes – and it is coming – they will know that a prophet is in their midst.” (33:33)

- Chapters 34-48: Prophecies of Consolation
 - Chapters 34-36: Oracles of Hope and Consolation
 - Chapter 34: Israel’s Shepherd³⁰⁹: In Chapter 34 God tells Ezekiel to prophesy to “the shepherds of Israel (i.e. its leaders). These shepherds are told that they “ate the fats (of the land) and wore the wool, you slaughtered the sheep (i.e. had good meat to eat), but you did not tend the flock. You did not sustain the weak, and did not heal the sick, you did not bandage the wounded nor did you return them that went astray nor search for the lost; you drove them with strength, and with hardship.” (34:3-4) God will punish these shepherds for what they have done and will dismiss them from their position. Just as a shepherd seeks his flock, God will seek out God’s flock and save them from all the places to which they have been scattered “on the day of clouds and gloom” (34:12).³¹⁰ God will take them out of the nations where they are, and will shepherd them back to the hills of Israel and to all their settlements. God will serve as the people’s judge: “As to you, my flock “**כִּי אָמַר יְהֹוָה אֵלֶיךָ נְאָזֶן** Thus said he LORD God, I will be your judge . . .” (34:17, cf. v. 20, 22). “And I will appoint upon you a single shepherd who will shepherd you, my servant David (i.e. a descendent of David) will shepherd you, and he will be for you a shepherd. And I, the LORD your God will be for you as a God, and my servant David³¹¹ the prince among you, I the LORD, have spoken.” (34:23-24). The people will dwell in security and prosperity, “And they will know that I am the LORD through my breaking the bars of their yokes and saving them from the hands of those that enslave them.” (34:27)
 - 35:1-36:12: Prophecy against Seir to Israel. In Chapter 35 Ezekiel is told to prophecy to Mount Seir.³¹² God predicts destruction of Mount Seir “**בְּעֵין** Because you had an everlasting enmity and handed over children of Israel by sword in the time of their calamity, and the time set for their destruction.” (35:6). “**לְכַד** therefore, as I live declares the LORD God,” they will be doomed with blood. Their cities would be destroyed forever, and their towns never again inhabited, “and you will know that I am the LORD.” (35:9) This is **בְּעֵין**, because, they figured both lands, Seir and Israel would become their inheritance (see footnote 312). “Just as you celebrated the inheritance of the House of Israel how it was made desolate, so I will do to you, desolate will be Mount Seir and all Edom, and you will know that I am the LORD.” In the beginning of Chapter 36, Ezekiel is told to prophecy to the Mountains of Israel about what would be happening to Seir.

³⁰⁹ This chapter bares resemblance to Jeremiah Chapter 23.

³¹⁰ Trans per JPS. The day is referred to as one of “annan” and “arafel,” which are fairly synonymous (*arafel* is probably a thicker cloudiness).

³¹¹ I.e. a descendent of King David.

³¹² Mount Seir is the home of the Edomites, descendants of Jacob’s brother Esau. In Deuteronomy (2:4, 5:8), the Israelites are ordered to leave Mount Seir as the inheritance of Esau’s progeny. Note that we saw a prophecy against Edom in 25:12-14 discussed above.

As the enemy said that they would inherit the land, and had made Israel a laughing stock, “ . . . כִּי אָמַר אֱלֹהִים לְכָן הֲנִזְעָקָם כִּי אֲנִי הִ” Therefore, thus Said the LORD God, I have lifted my hand (i.e. in oath) if those nations that surrounded you will not bare their own disgrace. And you, mountains of Israel will give your yield and bear your fruit to my nation Israel, because they will soon come.” (36:7-8) “And I will make there be many men and animals upon you, and they will be fruitful and multiply, and I will make you inhabited as in your days of old and make you better than you were originally, “וַיַּדְעָתֶם כִּי אֲנִי הִ” and you will know that I am the LORD.”

- 36:16-40 present a theological history of Israel. Israel lived on its land, but defiled it. Therefore, God poured out God’s wrath on them and scattered them about. However, this brought disgrace on God’s name, “when they (the other nations) said this is the nation of the LORD which has left its land. And I had mercy on My holy name . . . ” (36:20-21). “ . . . כִּי אָמַר אֱלֹהִים לְכָן אֱמֹן רַבֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי אֲנִי הִ” Therefore, tell the House of Israel, thus says the LORD God, it is not for your sake that I that I will act for the House of Israel, but rather for My holy name which you have profaned among the nations that you came to.” (36:22) God will sanctify God’s name among these nations , “and the Nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the LORD God through my sanctification through you, before their eyes.” (36:23). God will gather the people from all the lands that they have gone, “and I will throw upon you pure water and you will be purified from all your impurities and all your uncleanness I will purify you.” God will give the people a “a new heart and a new spirit” to make it that the people will follow God’s ways and laws” and “you will be for me a nation and I will be for you a God” (36:26-28).³¹³ The people will remember their acts of old and will be disgusted at themselves (v. 31). “Not for your sake do I do this, declares the LORD God, let this be known to you, be ashamed and embarrassed from your ways, House of Israel.” (36:32)³¹⁴ Verses 33-38 soften the harshness of the message, speaking of the bright future.

■ Chapter 37: Visions of Reunification and Rebuilding:

- 37:1-14³¹⁵ The Vision of the Dry Bones: As this chapter begins, Ezekiel is whisked away and put down “in a valley, which was full of bones,” which are described as plentiful, and very dry. God asks Ezekiel rhetorically, “Shall these bones live?” to which Ezekiel responds, “LORD, God, you know.” God instructs Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones and tell them that God says that God will bring

³¹³ This statement of covenantal relationship finds expression throughout the Bible. See footnote 233 regarding Jeremiah 30:22 at page 97.

³¹⁴ The ideas of this chapter, that the people’s sins necessitated their exile, and that for God’s own sake God would reconcile with them and “change their hearts” so they would follow God’s ways is found in many other texts. See e.g. Ezekiel Chapter 20, Jeremiah Chapter 32 and Ezekiel 39. Prophets often argue that God should not punish the people because people might see anything bad that happens to the Israelite people as indicating God’s lack of power. See p. 113, footnote 286 and accompanying text. Israel, in its defeat, is often seen as being taunted with the question, “Where is your God, see e.g. Micah 7:10, p. 149, text accompanying footnote 149.

³¹⁵ This vision forms the Haftorah for *Shabbat Chol Homo’ed Passover*.

by a wind (alt: spirit) and they will live. Ezekiel prophesizes to the bones, and while he is speaking a great noise begins as each bone comes close to its connecting bone. Ezekiel looks and sees that the bones are covered with sinews and flesh, but they are still lifeless. Ezekiel is told to prophesy to the wind and tell them that God commands them to “breath into these slain [bodies] so that they may live.” (37:9) The wind obliges and the bodies live and “stand on their feet, a great multitude.” (37:10) In verses 11-14 God explains that the bones are “the whole House of Israel, who say ‘our bones have become dry, and our hope is lost³¹⁶, we are doomed.’” (37:11) Ezekiel is told to further prophesy to them that God will open their graves and take them up from their graves and bring them onto Israel’s earth. “... וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֲלֵיכֶם כִּי אָנֹכִ הִ... and you will know that I, LORD have spoken and done, declares the LORD.” (37:14)

- 37:15-28³¹⁷ In the second part of Chapter 37 (a related, though distinct message), Ezekiel is told to take two sticks, upon one of which he is to write “For Judah and for Israel its friend,” and upon the other of which he is to write, “For Joseph- the stick of Ephraim – and all the House of Israel its friends.”³¹⁸ Ezekiel is to hold the two sticks together, and they will become one.³¹⁹ When people ask what Ezekiel is doing, he is to explain that that he is going to take the two sticks and they will become one stick. Ezekiel will further explain that God will gather the Children of Israel, bring them to their land, and make them one people, with one king, and they will no longer be two kingdoms. They will no longer be defiled by their fetishes and abominations (i.e. idolatry), and they will be saved from all their settlements where they sinned, “and they will be for me a nation, and I will be for them a God.” (37:23) “And my servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd and will follow my laws and keep my statutes and do them.” (37:24) “And I shall covenant with them a covenant of peace, an everlasting covenant will be with them, and I will place them and I will multiply them, and I will place my sanctuary in their midst forever.” (37:26) “And the nations will know that I, the LORD sanctify Israel when my sanctuary is in their midst forever.” (27:28)
- Chapters 38-39: Visions of apocalyptic war with Gog. In these chapters, Ezekiel is told to prophesy against “Gog of the land of Magog,” a future/mythical enemy³²⁰. In a time where Israel has returned to its land and is dwelling in security, Gog and his many allied armies would attack Israel, lusting after the booty of the Israelites who are dwelling in unfortified cities. Hordes of soldiers would come to attack, but God’s

³¹⁶ “Our Hope is Lost,” אָבֶדֶת תְּקִוָתֵנוּ” (*avdah tikvatenu*) is reversed in Israel’s national anthem, “*Hatikvah* –The Hope” in which we say “עוֹד לֹא אָבֶדֶת תְּקִוָתֵנוּ” (*od lo avdah tikvatenu*) – our hope is still not lost.

³¹⁷ This vision forms the Haftorah for the Torah portion Vayigash.

³¹⁸ As we have seen before, “Judah” is refers to the Southern Kingdom of the Children of Israel, while “Ephraim” refers to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. See on 1 Kings 12, above p. 61.

³¹⁹ The theme of reunification of the kingdoms is found in other places in the Bible as well, for example Hosea 2:1-3, see text accompanying footnote 347 p. 129.

³²⁰ Encyclopedia Judaica “Gog and Magog” and “Ezekiel” speculate that Gog is a reference to “Gyges of Lydia,” Note that Magog is one of the sons of Noah’s Son Yaphet, see Genesis 10:2.

anger would be enraged and there would be “a great earthquake”³²¹ upon the land of Israel and the fish of the sea, birds of the sky, beasts of the field and crawlers that crawl upon the face of the earth and every human on earth shall tremble before me, and the mountains will be destroyed and the cliffs shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground . . . and every person’s sword shall be against his fellow” (Ezek. 38:19-21) Pestilence, hailstones etc. are included in the supernatural event. “**וְהַקְדִּשֵּׁתִי וְהַתָּגַלֵּתִי** *I shall sanctify and magnify myself*³²² *and shall make myself known in the eyes of the many nations, and they shall know that I am the Lord*” (38:23)” Chapter 39 opens with God again telling Ezekiel to prophesy to Gog, with further description of Gog’s destruction. The chapter describes how the wood from the armies’ weapons will be enough that the inhabitants of Israel will not need to cut fire wood for seven years (39:9). Gog’s army will be buried in “The Valley of the Travelers,” but the burial will block the route so it will become known as the “Valley of Gog’s Multitude.” (39:11) “And the Children of Israel will [take] seven months burying them in order to cleanse the land.”(39:12) There is a picturesque invitation to all animals to come to God’s “sacrificial feast” (trans per JPS), “You will eat the meat of warriors and the blood of the princes of earth . . . and you will eat fats to your satiation, and drink your fill of blood from the sacrificial feast I make of them (Gog’s army).” (39:18-19). The House of Israel will know from that point on that God is their God, “And all the nations will know that it was because of their (the Israelite’s) sins that the House of Israel was exiled, because they dealt treacherously with me, and I hid my face³²³ from them and gave them to the hands of those that trouble them, and they all fell by the sword.” (39:23) “When I return them from the nations and gather them from the lands of their enemies, I will be sanctified through them before the nations.” (29:27)³²⁴

▪ Chapters 40-48: Visions of the New Temple.

- 40:1-42:20: A Tour of the Renewed Temple³²⁵: “In the twenty fifth year of our exile,³²⁶ at the beginning of the year (*berosh hashanah*³²⁷) in the tenth of the

³²¹ Lit. “A great sound.”

³²² The opening to this verse, **וְהַקְדִּשֵּׁתִי וְהַתָּגַלֵּתִי** *I shall sanctify and magnify myself* is borrowed for the first words of Kaddish: **יְהִיגָּל וַיְהִקְרַב שְׁמַה רֶא**. May his great name be sanctified and magnified, see above section on Kaddish p.14.

³²³ Regarding the metaphor of God “Hiding God’s face,” see above, footnote 189 on Isaiah 59:2-3, page 84.

³²⁴ This reflects the ideas we saw, for example, on 36:16-40, that Israel’s defeat was perceived as being a result of God’s weakness, and that God will have to reinstate the people in order to prove this idea wrong.

³²⁵ These chapters create a counterbalance to Ezekiel’s experiences in chapters 8-11, where he viewed the abominations that were happening in the soon-to-be-destroyed Temple.

³²⁶ I.e. 25 years after the exile of Yehoyahchin in 597 BCE. See footnote 253 on page 104 and text accompanying.

³²⁷ NB: *Rosh Hashanah* here means simply “at the beginning of the year,” and does not refer to the holiday. *Rosh Hashanah* as a name of a holiday is rabbinic.

month,³²⁸ in the fourteenth year after the city was destroyed³²⁹ – on that selfsame day – the hand of the LORD was upon me and he brought me there.” (40:1) Ezekiel is brought to the Temple where he sees a man shining like copper and holding a linen cord and measuring rod. The man instructs him, “Son of Man, see with your eyes and hear with your ears, and pay attention to all that I show you, for it is in order to show you that you are brought here – tell all that you see to the House of Israel” (40:4). Ezekiel is taken all around the Temple as each part is measured and we are told what each measurement was and we are occasionally told the function of an area (for instance a chamber where certain offerings would be washed or slaughtered, where the priests performed their duties).³³⁰ We are also given some description of the decorations, including Cherubs (see e.g. 41:25), the creatures we have met in Chapter 1 and Chapter 9.³³¹

- 43:1-9: God’s Return: Ezekiel describes how his guide takes him to a gate that faces East. “And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the path of the East, its sound being as the sound of great waters, and the earth lit up with His glory.” (43:2) Ezekiel says the vision of God is much like the appearance of God during the destruction of the Temple that he saw prophetically (chapters 8-11). God’s glory comes into the temple through the gate to the east, much as it had exited to the East in 11:23. A spirit lifts Ezekiel into the inner courtyard, which is filled with God’s glory. God speaks to Ezekiel telling how the people will no longer stray from God’s ways: “Now their harlotry and the corpses of kings will be from me and I shall dwell among them forever.” (43:9).
- 43:10-46:24: God’s continues instructions concerning the Temple: Much like 40:1-42:20, in this section Ezekiel receives instructions concerning the Temple.³³² However, now that God’s glory has returned, Ezekiel’s instructor is God, rather than by the angelic man. God tells Ezekiel to tell the House of Israel about the Temple and that they should be embarrassed about their previous behavior. When/if they are ashamed, Ezekiel is to give them all the details about the Temple so that they may follow all of the instructions.
- 43:13-27: The altar & dedication sacrifices: Ezekiel is given the measurements of the altar in 43:13-17 and then the instructions for offerings during the consecration of the Temple in 43:18-27. These sacrifices are to be done by “the Levitical priests who are from the seed of Zadok who may approach me, declares the LORD

³²⁸ I.e. Yom Kippur.

³²⁹ I.e. 4 years after 586.

³³⁰ The Priests (Kohanim) are described as “The Priests who keep the duties of the Temple” (40:45-46) and “The Priests who keep the duties of the altar, these are the Children of Zadok, who among the Children of Levi may approach the LORD to minister to him.” This represents a limitation of priestly duties to the Zadokite priests, which is further explained in chapter 44. The name Zadok presumably refers to a priest in the time of David, and the Zadokites are his descendants. See Sam. 15:24–37, 19:12–13, 1 Kings 2:35 and EJ on “Zadok.”

³³¹ See above p. 106 footnote 257 and accompanying text.

³³² There are some difficulties in reconciling the description of the Temple given by Ezekiel and the descriptions found in the Torah. See above p. 104 footnote 255 and accompanying text.

God to seve me . . ." (43:19).³³³ The consecration last seven days, just as the dedication of the tabernacle in the wilderness.³³⁴ The sacrifices are mainly sin offerings. "And it shall be on the eighth day and onwards that the Kohanim shall sacrifice upon the alter their sacrifices and peace offerings and I shall accept you, declairs the LORD God." (43:27).

• 44:1-31 The promotion of the Zadokites: In 44:1-3 Ezekiel is showed the gate facing East, through which God had entered in 43:4. The gate is shut and God says that since God entered through that gate, no one else may enter it. Then Ezekiel is taken to the North gate which is full of God's glory. God instructs Ezekiel to speak to "The rebellious House of Israel." They have committed abominations, such as bringing in "foreigners, [those of] uncircumcised spirit and uncircumcised flesh to be in my Sanctuary to defile it . . . and have broken my covenant through all your abominations." (44:8). Aliens and those of uncircumcised spirit or flesh are forbidden to enter the Temple. God says that the Levites (including Kohanim, presumably) "who distanced themselves from me when Israel went astray from me" will be servants in the Temple **לען**, because, "they served the people before their fetishes" (i.e. they performed idolatrous rites for them). "They shall not draw close to me to minister (*lekahen*, from the same root as Kohen) to me . . . and they will bare their shame and abominations which they did." (44:13) "But the levitical priests, the descendants of Zadok who served the Sanctuary service while the House of Israel strayed from before me, they shall draw near to me to serve me and shall stand before me to sacrifice to me the fats and blood, declares the LORD God." (44:15) God then describes many of the laws regarding the priests, here applying particularly to the Zadokites. Rules are related concerning what they wear while serving, they are prohibited from shaving, they are prohibited from certain marital relationships, and they may only come in contact with a dead person where that person is a close relative.³³⁵ The Zadokites will also function as teachers and judges³³⁶: "And they shall instruct my nation between holy and profane, and between pure and impure they shall teach them. And they shall stand upon disputes to judge; [and] shall judge them according to My laws; and My teachings and My laws regarding all my festivals shall they guard, and my Sabbaths they shall sanctify." (44:23-24) These priests will get to eat the food from certain offerings as well as the first fruits and tithes.³³⁷

• 45:1-17 presents some city planning. When the land is apportioned, space would be set aside for the Temple, for living quarters for the Priests and Levites, and for

³³³ Regarding the exclusivity of Zadokite priests, see above footnote 333 and chapter 44 below.

³³⁴ See Exodus 29:37, Leviticus 8:33, 35.

³³⁵ Note that most of these are given to the Kohanim in the Torah, though some of the laws seem slightly different from the plain meaning of the Torah. See above p. 104 footnote 255 and accompanying text.

³³⁶ These are both functions of priests in the Torah. For example, see Deut. 17:8 and following regarding the Kohen's function as legal decisor/judge.

³³⁷ The final verse of chapter 31 speaks about the Kohanim not eating unkosher meat. It is not terribly clear whether this verse indicates a strain of thought whereby kosher laws applied only to Kohanim, or if there are some special laws concerning e.g. sacrificial meat.

others. The leader (*nasi*, prince) is warned against cheating the people and particular contributions to the *nasi* are prescribed and the *nasis* are admonished to have fair weights and measures. The *nasi* will have the obligation of providing funding for all communal sacrifices.

• 45:18-46: provides a sacrificial calendar, which is in some ways consistent with the Torah's calendar (e.g. Passover is described as the fourteenth day of the first month) while at other times the relationship is confusing (e.g. there is no mention of Yom Kippur and Sukkot, and there is mention of an offering to purge sin on the first day of the first and seventh months which is not mentioned in the Torah). Some argue that this calendar was set particularly for the year of the consecration of the new Temple. Others might argue that there is some amendments being made to the regular sacrificial system, but this begs the question of whether a prophet can amend Torah law. There is description of how the *Nasi* brings the sacrifices to the Temple, as well as how the people bring their personal sacrifices. The people are to enter one gate of the Temple and exit from another gate. In 46:18, the *nasi* is prohibited from taking property from others in order to give it to his children.³³⁸ In 46:19-24 Ezekiel is taken to see the areas where sacrifices would be cooked.

- 47:1-12: The vision of the lifegiving stream: In this vision, Ezekiel is taken by the angelic man with the measuring stick to see a stream of water that goes beneath the Temple and gushes out from under the Southern wall. Ezekiel is taken deeper into the stream each time by one thousand cubits until the water is not passable without swimming. As he is taken back to dry land he sees the stream is lined by trees. The angelic figure explains that the water will flow all the way into the Dead Sea, which would then become good water which would sustain life (except for some swamps off of the Dead Sea that would supply salt). “And upon the stream on its banks on both sides all manner of food trees (i.e. trees bearing fruit) will not wither nor will its fruit stop to give fruit every month for its waters are emanating from the Sanctuary, and its fruits shall be for eating and its leaves for healing.” (47:12)
- 47:13-48:35 closes the book of Ezekiel with instructions as to the lands that each tribe would get in the reinstated Israel. The borders would be from the Mediterranean to the Jordan river/Dead Sea valley, and would not extend to Transjordan, as was “originally intended,” so to speak in Numbers 34:1-12 before some tribes decided to stay in Transjordan. Each tribe would get an equal territory (47:14) except that Joseph would get two shares.³³⁹ Each tribe would get a strip of land extending from the Mediterranean to the Jordan river to the Dead Sea valley. “Strangers” (i.e. converts) would receive a portion of land within the tribe where they dwell, “. . . they shall be to you as [those] naturally born in Israel . . . ” (47:22). Chapter 48 tells us where each tribe is situated, running from North to South. To the South of Judah (and North of Benjamin) is the area set aside in chapter 45 for the Temple city as well as some territory for the *nasi*. The gates of

³³⁸ See 1 Samuel 8:14, where Samuel warns the people that creating a monarchy would lead to their property being taken. 1 Kings 22 (above p. 63) documents such a case.

³³⁹ Recall that Jacob’s blessing to Joseph is that his two children, Ephraim and Menashe would be treated as Jacob’s children, and thus each of them become the founder of a tribe. See Gen. 48:5.

the city are described. The book of Ezeiel finishes by saying about the Temple city: “And the name of the city from that day [onward shall be]: ‘The LORD is There’”

4) The “Minor Prophets” AKA “The 12.”

The 12 so called “Minor Prophets” is a compilation of twelve prophetic books. They are referred to as “minor” not in the sense of their importance, but in the size of each work. This compilation is also known as שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר (*shnayim asar*) or תְּרֵי עָשָׂר (*trei assar*) the Hebrew and Aramaic, respectively, for “twelve.” The order in which prophets appear within this compilation is somewhat based on historical placement, but also based on word associations.³⁴⁰

a) Hosea

Note: As always, this introduction is based on Encyclopedia Judaica “Hosea” and the JPS Haftorah Commentary overview of Hosea.

The first verse of Hosea tells us that the work represents “The word of the LORD that came to Hosea ben Be’eri in the days of Uziyah, Yotam, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah and in the days of Yeravam ben Yoash the King of Israel.” Although the dates of these kings present some difficulties, we can say that these are prophecies in the 8th century BCE. Together with his contemporaries Amos and Isaiah, Hosea is thus one of the earliest of the classical prophets of ancient Israel whose prophecies are known and have been written down and collected.³⁴¹ For the most part, the prophecies are directed to the Northern Kingdom.³⁴² Modern scholars believe most of the references to Judah in this work were added in later in order to make the prophecies more relevant to the Judaean audience after the fall of the Israelite kingdom.

The historical references within Hosea are somewhat vague. Where the verses seemt to refer to historical events otherwise know, we will make reference to those events, but we should take these associations with a grain of salt.

By and large, Hosea presents prophecies of doom. Israel has forsaken God by committing idolatry, and in so forsaking the God of morality, they have become corrupt. Lacking faith in God, Israel has sought protection through alliances with its neighbors, further exposing them to foreign religions and imarality. Using the metaphor of husband and wife with which we have already become familiar in other works, God will punish Israel, the unfaithful spouse, by throwing her out, i.e. exiling the people. With all this, God’s love for God’s people will endure. God will purify the people and lead them to repentance. A remnant will return to Israel and will be faithful to God.

Hosea is broken into two major subparts, Chapters 1-3 which relate to God’s telling Hosea to marry a prostitute (Chapters 1-2) and befriend a woman (Chapter 3, a second side of the same story) and Chapters 4-14 a more varied compilation of prophecies and speaches.

³⁴⁰ Encyclopedia Judaica “Minor Prophets” notes that the the similarity between Joel 4:16 and Amos 1:2 causes the Book of Amos to follow the book of Joel. See further the introduction to the book of Joel, below p. 340 text accompanying footnote 133.

³⁴¹ JPS Haftorah Commentary overview of Hosea.

³⁴² On the split of the Northern and Soutehrn Kingdom see 1 Kings 12:1-24, discussed above p. 61.

A review of the contents of Hosea:

Chapter 1-3 Hosea's Prostitute Wife & Children

- Chapter 1: Hosea's prostitute wife and symbolic names of children: At the open of Chapter 1, we are told (in third person narrative) that God instructed Hosea: "Take a wife of whoredom and children of whoredom, because the land shall prostitute itself from following the LORD" (1:2). The marriage of a prostitute symbolizes the peoples' unfaithfulness to God, and the resulting children are children of unfaithfulness. Hosea "takes" (i.e. marries) Gomer daughter of Divlaim and she conceives and has a boy. God tells Hosea, "Call his name 'Yizre'el' because shortly I shall visit punishment [for] the blood of Yizre'el³⁴³ upon the house of Yehu³⁴⁴ and will cut the House of Israel from monarchy." (1:4). Hosea has a daughter, whom God tells Hosea to name "*Lo-Ruchama*" (= "I Shall not be merciful" or "I shall not forgive" or "I shall not accept") because God will not be merciful toward/forgive/accept the House of Israel.³⁴⁵ After *Lo-Ruchamah* is weined, Hosea has another son, about whom God says "Call his name "*Lo-ami*" (= "not my nation") for you are not my nation, and I shall not be for you [a God]." (1:9)³⁴⁶
- Chapter 2 breaks from the narrative form of Chapter 1 in favor of prophetic homily, but it uses the imagery of Chapter 1 as its jumping off point.
 - 2:1-3 are a prediction of a brighter future, counterbalancing the doom predicted in Chapter 1. "And the number of the Children of Israel will be as the sand of the sea which cannot be measured nor counted, and instead of being said to them "you are not my nation," it will be said of them "the children of the living God." (2:1). Israel and Judah will be come together into one nation³⁴⁷ In a reversal of the names of Hosea's children in Chapter 1, verse 2:33 says: "Say of your brother "*ami* (you are my nation)," and of your sister "*ruchamah* (I will forgive/be merciful)." (2:3)
 - 2:4-15 is a prophecy about Israel's misdeeds. This section uses the unfaithful mother as symbolic of the nation's history of unfaithfulness to God, and bids them to break with that history. "Strive with your mother, strive, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband, let her remove her harlotry from before her and her adultery from her breasts." (2:4)³⁴⁸ "I shall not forgive/accept (*arachem*) her children because they

³⁴³ Winter capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

³⁴⁴ I.e. upon Yehu's dynasty. In 2 Kings 9 and following (see above p. 65 and following), Yehu is anointed as King of Israel on orders of the prophet Elisha. He is ordered to overthrow Achav. Yehu kills Achav and *Izevel*, most of Achav's family and allies, and also many worshippers of *ba'al*. Generally, 2 Kings sees God as approving of Yehu's actions, though he fails to stop the golden calf worship established by Jeroboam. God says in 2 Kings 10:31 that several generations of Achav's progeny would hold monarchy (i.e. that he good enough to have a monarchy, but not good enough to merit a permanent hold on power).

³⁴⁵ Parenthetically, 1:7 says that Judah, i.e. the Southern Kingdom will be forgiven.

³⁴⁶ This is the reverse of the covenantal promise we see so often in the Bible, "You will be for me a nation, and I will be for you a God." See above p.97 footnote 233 for other such references.

³⁴⁷ The theme of reunification of the kingdoms is found in other places in the Bible as well, for example Ezekiel 37:15-28, see text accompanying footnote 319 p. 122.

³⁴⁸ The image of the people of Israel as an unfaithful mother/wife is quite common throughout the Bible.

- are the children of her whoredom" (2:6). She will run after her lovers.³⁴⁹ She does not understand that God has provided all her needs (2:10), "therefore I will return and take back my grain in its season and my grapes at its harvest time (i.e. God will not provide for a successful agriculture) and I will grab my wool and linen that clothes her nakedness. " (2:11)
- 2:16-25 returns to the theme of future reconciliation. "Therefore, I will seduce her, and take her into the wilderness and speak to her heart."³⁵⁰ "And I will remove the names of the false gods from her mouth, and their names will no longer be mentioned. (2:19). God at that point will remember God's covenant "with the beasts of the field and with the birds of the sky and the crawlers of the earth, and bows and swords and war I will break from the land, and I will let them rest in safety." (2:20) "And I will betroth you to me forever, and I will betroth you to me in righteousness, justice, goodness and mercy." And I will betroth you to me in faithfulness, and you will know that I am the LORD." (2:21-22).³⁵¹
 - Chapter 3 is presented in autobiographical form with a story whose message is similar to that of Chapters 1-2, and may relate the same episode. The Lord further said to me: Go love a woman who loves and seduces [another] just as the LORD loves the Children of Israel and they turn to other gods . . ." (3:1). Hosea hires a woman, and tells her not to have relations with anyone (including himself), "For for many days the Israelites shall sit without a King and without a leader and without sacrifice . . ." (3:4) after which Israel will seek God and David their king.

Chapter 4-14 Hosea's Prophecies. Per EJ, these prophecies break down basically to three literary units, chapters 4-7, chapters 8-14:1, and 14:2-10. The prophecies focus on the misdeeds of those in the Northern Kingdom, often referred to by the name "Ephraim."

- Hosea 4-7: Ephraim's immorality. These chapters focus on the immoral behaviors of Ephraim, with little or no mention of idolatry. "Hear the word of the LORD, Children of Israel, for the LORD has a case against the dwellers of the land, for there is no honesty nor righteousness and there is no knowledge of God in the land. There is [false] swearing and lying and murder and stealing and adultery, they break [my laws] and murder follows murder." (4:1-2) Destruction will follow for these misdeeds. "I will not punish your daughters when they prostitute themselves, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, for they themselves separate themselves with prostitutes, and sacrifice with cult prostitutes³⁵² and a nation that does not understand will stumble." (4:14) Chapter 5 condemns the leaders of Israel who have failed in their responsibility to keep people in line. "Hear this, Priests, pay

³⁴⁹ This analogy is to Israel's chasing after false gods.

³⁵⁰ Some interpret this "wilderness" (*midbar*, often translated "desert") to refer to the destroyed areas of Israel. However, I think that this verse is better understood as a reference to a return to the Sinai wilderness for a recreation of the Jewish relationship with God. This image of a return to the wilderness for purposes of reconciliation between God and Israel is also found in Ezekiel 20, see above p. 114 text accompanying footnote 290.

³⁵¹ Hosea 2:21-22 is commonly said as a person wraps tefillin around the fingers. This makes the tefillin seem akin to a wedding ring between God and the individual.

³⁵² Cult prostitution was common in the ancient near east, though it is roundly condemned throughout the Bible, see e.g. Deut. 23:18-19, cf. Encyclopedia Judaica "Prostitution."

attention House of Israel, give ear house of the King, for you is the [responsibility] for justice . . ." (5:1) The people's sins make them unable to return to God (5:4); "With sheep and cattle they go to seek the LORD, but do not find Him, He is cut off from them." "They have been unfaithful to the LORD, for they have birthed alien children . . ." (5:7). The leaders became aware of their "sickness" (i.e. their country's weakness) and have turned to Assyria for help, "who cannot help you." (5:13). In Chapter 6, the people are bid, "Let us return to the LORD for he has attacked and can heal us, struck and can treat us." God exclaims that God can't help the people when their righteousness is so fleeting (6:4). "For I desire righteousness and not sacrifice, and knowledge of God more than offerings." (6:6) "When I would heal Israel, the iniquities of Ephraim become apparent to me, and the evils of Shomron³⁵³ . . ." (7:1) "Israel's greatness has been humbled before it, but they have not returned to the LORD their God and have not sought him despite all this." (7:10)

- Hosea 8-14:1 further indictments of Israel for the transgressions discussed above, along with discussion of Israel's idolatry. There are many mentions of the people turning toward Egypt and Assyria. "[God] rejects your calf, Shomron, my wrath is enraged by them, for how long will they be incapable of purity."³⁵⁴ (8:5) "I found Israel [to be] as [pleasing as] grapes in the wilderness, like the first ripening fig tree I viewed your forebathers, but they went toward Ba'al Peor and turned to shamefulness and they were as detested [by me] as they were loved."³⁵⁵ (8:10) "My God will reject them for they have not listened to him, and they shall be wanderers among the nations." (9:17) Along with these references to idolatry are references to immorality. "They have become greatly corrupt as in the days of Gibeah, their sins will be remembered, their transgressions punished."³⁵⁶ (9:9)

- In Chapter 11, God is reminiscent of God's earlier relationship with Israel, and seeming can't bring Godself to destroy the people. "Israel was young, and I loved him, and from [its time in Israel] I called him my son. They were called this, but they went on their own, sacrificed to ba'als (false gods) and gave incense to idols." (11:1-2) "No! They return to the Land of Egypt, and Assyria is their king, because they refuse to repent." (11:5). "How can you give up, Ephraim? [How can I] surrender you, Israel? How could I make you like Admah and Tzevo'ayim.³⁵⁷ My heart had flipped on me, all together my mercies are aroused." (11:8-9) I shall not act [according to] my enraged wrath, because I am God and not man, [I am] the Holy in your midst and I will not come in fury. They shall follow after the LORD as a roaring lion, when he roars and its children come

³⁵³ Samaria, capital of the Northern Kingdom.

³⁵⁴ This verse refers to the golden calves created by King Yeravam. See on 1 Kings 12:25-14:21, above at p. 61.

³⁵⁵ The reference in this verse is the the Ba'al Pe'or Incident at Numbers 25, where the Israelites were seduced by Mo'abite women and began to worship their god, Ba'al Pe'or.

³⁵⁶ Gibeah, also mentioned in Hosea 10:9, is a reference to the story in Judges 19-20 where a concubine is ravaged to her death. See above p. 50. That incident called to mind the attempted rape of the messengers taking Lot out of Sodom before its destruction. We will see in Hosea 11:8 that God considers destroying Israel as God did to Sodom.

³⁵⁷ Towns destroyed along with Sodom and Gemora, see Deut. 29:22.

trembling from the west. They will come trembling as a bird from Egypt, and like a dove from the land of Assyria, and I will return them to their homes, declares the LORD.” (11:8-11)

- Chapter 12 uses the story of Jacob as a metaphor for the people’s dishonesty and the punishment they would receive. “Ephraim surrounds me with lies, Israel [surrounds me] with treachery . . .” (12:1) “The LORD once had a dispute with Judah³⁵⁸ and punished Jacob according to his ways, repaying him for his actions. He strove in the womb³⁵⁹ with his brother, and in his adulthood he strove with a divine being³⁶⁰ . . . But Jacob had to flee to the land of Aram, and Israel labored for a woman, and guarded sheep for a woman.³⁶¹” (Hosea 12:3-4, 13) The reference is to Jacob fleeing from Esau when he tricked his father into giving Him (Jacob) the blessing of the first born. Interestingly, this chapter seems to be quite derogatory toward Jacob, and sees God as punishing Jacob for his misdeeds. They prophet compares Jacob’s misdeeds to those of the current day Israel. The people are chastised for their deceitful acts, though they believe that their misdeeds do not amount to a sin. The people say: “ . . . in all my efforts a misdeed amounting to a sin cannot be found.” (12:9)
- Chapter 13 contrasts God’s favors to Israel and the result of their sin. “When Ephraim spoke there was trembling, he was exalted in Israel, but he sinned through Ba’al and died.³⁶² And now they continue to sin and have made themselves images from their silver according to their skills, entirely creations of craftsmen, regarding them, they say ‘they who sacrifice humans kiss calves.’” (13:2)³⁶³ “When they grazed they became sated; they became sated and haughty, and therefore forgot me.³⁶⁴ So I became like a lion to them, like a leopard lurking on the way.” (13:6-7) “Now where is your king, your savior in all your towns and your judges of whom you said ‘Give us Kings and princes.’³⁶⁵ I will give you a king through my anger, and I will take away [your king] in my wrath.” (13:10-11) 14:1 closes this unit: “For she has rebelled with her god, they shall fall by the sword, their infants shall be dashed, and their pregnant ones cut open.”

³⁵⁸ The reference to Judah seems confusing, and should perhaps be understood as a reference to Jacob.

³⁵⁹ See Genesis 25:22-26.

³⁶⁰ Translated per JPS. Lit. “with God.” The words here “שָׁרֵה אֶת אֱלֹהִים” are almost the same as the angel’s explanation of Giving Jacob the name Israel, “כִּי שְׁרִית עִם אֱלֹהִים וְעַמְּנָנִים וְתַוְקֵל,” for you have striven with divine beings (lit. God) and man and have succeeded.” (Gen 32:29)

³⁶¹ Whereupon Jacob fled to Aaram and ended up serving Laban for 14 years in (total) in order to marry Rachel. See Gen. 27-29.

³⁶² See above footnote 355.

³⁶³ I.e. human sacrifice is idolatry. The translation of this last phrase is far from certain. JPS translates: “Yet for these they appoint men to sacrifice; they are wont to kiss calves;” i.e. they appoint priests to Baal and like to worship the calf.

³⁶⁴ I.e. when they experienced success they felt secure and believed they no longer needed God’s help.

³⁶⁵ See on 1 Samuel 8:4 and following, p. 52, where the prophet Samuel is asked for a King, which is seen as a rejection of divine providence.

- Like all prophetic works, Hosea closes on an upbeat note. Hosea 14:2 through the end of Hosea³⁶⁶ presents a blueprint for return to God. God seems as a parent who has disowned a child, yet longs for reconciliation. “Return, Israel to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled in your sin.” (14:2) “Take with you words, and return to the LORD, say to him ‘bare all our iniquity (i.e. forgive us), and we make up for bulls with our lips.’³⁶⁷ Assyria will not save us, we shall not ride on a horse, and we will no longer say “our god” regarding the works of our hands, because in you the orphan finds pity” (14:2-4) God will become Israel’s protector and provider. Hosea closes: “Who is wise to understand these [ideas], intelligent to know them – that the ways of the LORD are straight (i.e. just), and the righteous will walk in them, and the sinners will stumble on them.” (14:10).

b) Joel

Note: As usual, this introduction is based on Encyclopedia Judaica “Joel” and the JPS Haftorah Commentary overview of Joel.

The opening verse of Joel refers to “The word of the LORD that was to Joel son of Pethuel.” Nothing is known about Joel either from this book³⁶⁸ or from elsewhere in the Bible. About the only thing that seems clear is that a Temple exists³⁶⁹, although this could be the first or the second Temple in Jerusalem. Verse 4:1 also indicates the existence of some “captives of Judah and Jerusalem,” which tends to date that prophecy to after at least some exile of Jerusalem, though not necessarily to after 586.³⁷⁰ Some speculate that the placement of Joel between Hosea and Amos indicates Joel lived in the 8th Century B.C.E.. However, many scholars believe there is indication that Hosea is later (during the Second Temple period), and perhaps Hosea is placed before Amos because of similar language³⁷¹ and references.

Joel can be divided into two main sections, both of which have a theme of impending destruction on “the day of the LORD”³⁷². Chapters 1-2 describes an unprecedented locust plague striking Israel. Chapters 3-4 describes an “end of days” through a calamitous war throughout the world. Scholars argue as to whether the first two and last two chapters of the book are by the same author. Both chapters, fitting into the “day of the LORD” motif speak of the flourishing of the righteous people who survive the calamity.

³⁶⁶ Note that this section is the main part of the Haftorah for Shabbat Shuva, the Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

³⁶⁷ I.e. replace sacrifice with spiritual prayer.

³⁶⁸ We can often learn a little about a prophet based on the kings nations to which he refers, etc. Joel has no references that are helpful in this manner.

³⁶⁹ See Joel 1:9 & 1:30, which refers to the inability to bring certain offerings in the “House of the LORD” due to the famine.

³⁷⁰ Recall, for example, that there was an exile during King Yehoyahcin in 597, p. 70, footnote 154 and accompanying text.

³⁷¹ See e.g. footnote 340, above at p. 128.

³⁷² On “The Day of the Lord,” see above p. 75 footnote 170 and the crossreferenced in that footnote.

A review of the contents of Joel:

Chapters 1-2: An unprecedented locust plague.

- In Chapter 1, Joel speaks of a calamitous plague of locusts which lays Israel bare. Joel points out that the people have never known such a severe attack of locusts, and tells the people to tell their children about this plague. The locusts are seen as a conquering army: “For a nation has come upon my land, vast and without number, its teeth are the teeth of a lion, and jaw-teeth are like a lioness.” (1:6) The people are bid to wail and lament their loss. There are references to the lack of availability of wine and grain for use in Temple rituals.³⁷³ The devastation is quite complete: “What was left over from the *gazam*, the *arbeh* ate, and what was left over from the *arbeh*, the *yelek* ate, and what was left over from the *yelek*, the *chesil* ate.”³⁷⁴ “The vine is dried up, and the fig is whithered, the pomegranate, even the date and apple, all trees of the field are dried; so too has joy dried up from men.” (1:12) The priests are told to lament and declare a fast and assembly. “Oh! for the day, for the day of the LORD is near, and will come as destruction from Sha-dai³⁷⁵. ” (1:14) Chapter 2 continues with the theme of bidding for people to turn to God in this time of distress. “Blast a Shofar in Zion, and sound an alarm on my holy mount, let all dwellers of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD, for it is close. A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of cloud and *arafel*³⁷⁶ spread over the hills as soot; a vast and great nation like it has never existed, and will never again be, throughout the years of generation and generation.” (2:1-2) The swarms of locusts are described as a oncoming army, with the sound of horses, and moving together in formation “ . . . each goes in his own path, their paths do not cross.” (2:7) God is the general in charge: “The LORD places his voice before his soldiers, for his camp is great, for many are those who do his bidding, for the day of the LORD is great and very terrible, and who can survive?” (2:11) The prophecy transitions to a message of potential hope in 2:12-13, telling people that further evil can be avoided through repentance: “‘But even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to me with all your hearts, with fasting, with tears and lament, and rent your hearts not your garments, and return of the LORD your God for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abundant in kindness, and repents from evil.’³⁷⁷” (2:13) The people are

³⁷³ 1:9, the term *nesech* refers to a wine libation, *mincha* to an offering of grain mixed with oil.

³⁷⁴ 1:4. The identity of species is unclear, though speculation is that each word represents a different stage of the locust’s development.

³⁷⁵ Sha-dai is a name of God.

³⁷⁶ I.e. a particularly dark, foreboding cloud. Note, however, that the “clouds” referred to here are likely the swarms of locusts covering the sun.

³⁷⁷ The relationship of this text to the famed “Thirteen Attributes” recited on Yom Kippur from Exodus 34:6-7 “ . . . The LORD, the LORD is a compassionate and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in kindness and truth . . .”) and to Num. 34:18 (“The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in kindness . . .”) is clear. Also related is Jonah 4:2: “you are a compassionate and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in kindness and who repents from evil,” see below p. 145 and text accompanying footnote 422 and Nahum 1:3, see below p. 150 text accompanying footnote 441. Interestingly, the phrase stating describing God as “אֲנַזְקָה לֹא יִנְזַק” (a Yoda-ism meaning “remit, God does not remit (punishment)) is prodigious throughout the Bible (Ex. 34:7, Num. 14:8, 1 Samuel 26:9, Jeremiah 30:11, Nahum 1:3), particularly together with phraseology as to how God is “abundant in kindness,” etc (Ex, Num., Nahum). Only Joel and Jeremiah

bid to declare a religious emergency, with fasting, assembly and prayer. All are to participate, including young children as well as bride and groom. “Between the porch and the alter let the priests, servants of the LORD, cry and say: ‘Have pity, oh LORD, upon your nation, and do not give over your inheritance to taunting, to be dominated by the nations; why should it be said among the peoples, ‘where is their Lord.’” (2:17)³⁷⁸ 2:18-27 pictures God taking pity on God’s land and God’s nation. God will send grain and wine. The people will be sated and will no longer be a laughing stock. “Children of Zion rejoice and be glad in the LORD your God, for He has given you (i.e. will give you) the first rain (*morah*) in kindness, and will cause to fall for you rain first (*morah*) and last (*malkosh*) as in the past.”³⁷⁹ (2:23) “And you will eat to satiation, and praise the name of the LORD your God who has done wonderfully for you, and my nation will never again be shamed. For in the midst of Israel am I, and I am the LORD your God and there is no other, and my nation will never again be shamed.” (2:27-28)

- Chapters 3-4 present another end of days prophecy. This time, destruction comes by way of war, rather than natural phenomenon. The prophecy begins by telling us that a time will come where God will pour out God’s spirit in the world, “and your sons and daughters will prophecy, your elders will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions.” (3:1) God will bring ominous signs. “The sun will turn dark, and the moon into blood before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD” (3:4) “And all that call in the name of the LORD will escape, because in Mount Zion and Jeruslaem there will be a remnant as the LORD said; and the survivors will be those who called the LORD.” (3:5) In this end of days, God will return “the captives of Judah and Jerusalem.” God will gather al the nations into the Valley of Yehoshaphat³⁸⁰ and “I (God) will be in judgment with them for my nation and inheritance, Israel, whom they dispersed among the nations and for my land which they divided up.” (4:2) God complains of how these

(which we read as the Haftorah on Yom Kipur) explicitly mention in these verses that God “repents from evil” – i.e. that God refrains from punishment (at least in the instance of repentance). This is not to say that Jeremiah and Jonah were exclusive in the belief that God can decide against punishment. After the Golden Calf, Moses pleads, “Return from the wrath of your anger, and repent from the evil [that you have declared] upon your nation.” (Ex. 32:12). In our High Holiday liturgy, when we recite the 13 divine attributes from Exodus 34, we say God is “The LORD, the LORD is a compassionate and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in kindness and truth . . . who bares sin, iniquity and misdeed, נָאַכְנָה”- i.e. God does remit punishment, conveniently leaving out the final part of the phrase “נָאַכְנָה יְהִי לְךָ” that God does not remit punishment.

³⁷⁸ We again see the notion that misfortunes which beset the Jewish people may make people believe that God is not present or is powerless. See above p. 113, footnote 286 and accompanying text, and p. 121, footnote 314 and accompanying text.

³⁷⁹ Israel relies heavily on rains coming in proper measure and at the proper time. The *morah* is the first rain, the *malkosh* the lats rain. See e.g. the second paragraph of the Shema, saying that if the Israelites follow God’s commandments, “and I will give you the dew of your land in its time, *yoreh* and *malkosh* . . . ” (Deut. 11:14)

³⁸⁰ Yehoshaphat translates to “The LORD has judged.” The location of this valley is unclear, though tradition associates it with the Kidron valley of Jersusalem. See Encyclopedia Judaica, “Valley of Jehoshaphat.”

nations have plundered Israel. “Call out thus among the nations: ‘prepare for war,’ arouse the warriers . . . beat your plowshears into swords and your pruning hooks into spears³⁸¹, the weakling will say, ‘I am mighty.’” (4:10) “And the LORD will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem will He set is voice; the heavens and earth will tremble, but the LORD will protect his nation, and will give strength to the children of Israel. And you will know that I am the LORD your God, who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain, and Jerusalem wil be holy, and foreigners (i.e. conquering armies) will not pass through it.” (4:16-7) On that day “the mountains will drip wine, and the hills will flow with milk . . . ” (4:18) “Egypt will be desolate, and Edom will be a wilderness due to the violence they did to Judah, in whose land they spilled innocent blood.” (4:19) “And Judah shall be always inhabited; Jeruslaem for generation and generation [will be inhabited]. And I will cleanse their blood which I have not cleansed³⁸², and the LORD shall dwell in Zion.” (4:20)

c) Amos

Note: As usual, this introduction is based on Encyclopedia Judaica “Amos” and the JPS Haftorah Commentary overview of Amos.

Amos, along with Isaiah and Hosea is one of the earliest prophets for whom we have a literary work (many believe he is the earliest). The first verse of Amos tells us, “[These are] the words of Amos the herdsman from Tekoa, who prophesized on Israel during the days of Uziah, King of Judah and during the days of Yeravam son of Yoash, King of Israel, two years before the earthquake.”^{383, 384}. This was (per JPS) during a period of decline in Assyria’s control over west Asia, resulting in Yiravam’s (Jeroboam) expansion of the Northern Kingdom and a period of economic success.³⁸⁵ Amos often uses imagery of a day of total darkness. This may be explained by the solar eclipse of 15 June 763 B.C.E. or perhaps one in 784 B.C.E. (JPS)

There are four main sections to the work: Prophecies against nations (1:3-2:5); prophecies against Judah and Israel (2:6-6:14); autobiographical information about Amos (7:1-9:6); and prophecies of hope (9:7-15). There is some overlap in these sections. The prophecy against Israel in 2:6 is in the same form as the prophecies against nations, and so presumably some or all of the balance of Chapter 2 belongs in the first unit. Further, the autobiographical section includes autobiographical narrative of some of Amos’s prophecies against Israel.

Some key points and themes about The Book of Amos:

³⁸¹ Note the reversal of Isaiah 2:4, “And they will beat their swords into plowshears, and their spears into pruning hooks.”

³⁸² This likely means that God will avenge the blood of the unavenged innocents mentioned in 4:19.

³⁸³ For more information on this time period, see the discussion of II Kings 13 and following, above at p. 66 (note that King Uziah is known there as Azariah).

³⁸⁴ The earthquake is presumed to be an earthquake known from outside sources to have occurred around the year 760 B.C.E and seems to be a famous historical event, also mentioned by Zechariah (14:5) some two centuries later.

³⁸⁵ Recall the mention of Jonah’s prophecy that Yeravam would expand his kingdom despite his evils, (II Kings 14:25), p. 67 above, text accompanying footnote 140.

- Amos often refers to his being a commoner, and not a professional prophet, e.g. 7:14, “I am neither a prophet nor a son of a prophet.” JPS questions to what extent this is more rhetoric than truth, in that his prophecies are highly stylized and formulaic. Given this, although Amos and Hosea are some of the earliest prophets for whom we have writings, JPS argues that they “are both clearly heirs to a rich tradition.”
- The main focus of Amos is on the injustices perpetrated by the people, particularly the mistreatment of the poor by the wealthy, although ritual violations are mentioned as well (though, even there, the ritual violations involve immorality).
- Amos’s words are directed most often (if not entirely) at the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He often mentions places of worship in the Northern Kingdom, which may well have been the sites of much of his activity (EJ).
- Amos’s prophecies of doom seem to presume that the hope for repentance is lost and punishment is inescapable.
- Interjected into the book are short praises of God. Scholars disagree as to how these sections fit into the work.
- The prophecies in Amos span many decades. Per EJ, some prophecies are from before the earthquake and before Yeravam’s expansion (see e.g. 7:2 and 7:5 describing Israel as “small”); while others refer to Israel’s expansion east of the Jordan (e.g 6:13).

A review of the content of Amos:

- 1:1-1:2 – Introduction.
- 1:3-2:5 Prophecies against nations: This section contains a series of prophecies against nations, each prophecy is introduced with the phrase “Thus says the LORD: For the three sins of <nation> and for four [sins] I shall not repeal it³⁸⁶ because they . . .³⁸⁷” and most end with words like “Said the LORD.” Some misdeeds of the nation are enumerated (usually 1 or two sins are mentioned), followed by God’s saying that God will bring doom to that nation, mostly by fire. For each of the nations, their misdeeds involve exiling people from Israel and taking its land and possessions. However, last among the nations addressed is Judah³⁸⁸: “Thus says the LORD: For the three sins of Judah and for four [sins] I shall not repeal it; because they rejected the Torah of the LORD, and did not keep his commandments; and they were led astray by their visions after which their forbearers walked. And I shall set fire upon Judah and it will devour the fortresses of Jerusalem.” (2:4-5)
- 2:6-6:14 Prophecies against Israel.³⁸⁹
 - 2:6-2:16: The opening of this section is really a continuation of the previous section, “Thus says the LORD: For the three sins of Israel and for four [sins] I shall not repeal

³⁸⁶ A decree of punishment.

³⁸⁷ כִּי אָמַר הָאֱלֹהִים שְׁלַשָּׁה פְּשֻׁעִים וְעֶלְיוֹן אֲרָבָּה לֵאמֹר אַנְשִׁיכְנוּ עַל . . .

³⁸⁸ I.e. the Southern kingdom, as opposed to the Northern Kingdom, known as “Israel”. See 1 Kings 12:1-24, discussed above p. 61.

³⁸⁹ Note that some of these prophecies may be further subdivided. The prophecies of Chapter 3, 4, and 5:1-17 all open with “Hear this word.” The prophecies of 5:18-27 and Chapter 6 both open with the word “Oy.”

it; because they sold the just person for silver, and the pauper for sandals.” (2:6)³⁹⁰ But there is no description of destruction through fire which was present for all other nations. Some scholars argue that the balance of Chapter 2 is the conclusion of this set of prophecies, while others argue that the conclusion of a prophecy against Israel similar to the prophecies against the other nations was not preserved, and instead, 2:7 and following is a separate prophecy (EJ). The prophecy decries Israel’s trampling on the poor as well as their sexual immorality. While in the House of the Lord they drink alcohol, and they sit at the altar with clothing taken as collateral on a loan.³⁹¹ The prophecy catalogs some of the things that God has done for Israel including defeating the Amorites, taking the people out of Egypt, and choosing prophets and nazarites for them. “But you gave your nazarites wine³⁹², and you commanded your prophets saying: ‘Do not prophecy.’” (2:13) For all their wrongdoing, the people will not be swift enough to flee on the day of their destruction.

- In Chapter 3 God speaks of God’s unique relationship with the people Israel, and the consequences of that relationship, “Only you have I known from all the families of the earth, therefore I shall visit upon you (i.e. punish you for) all your iniquities.” (3:2) There is a series of rhetorical questions “. . . Does a lion roar if it has no prey? . . . Does a bird fall upon the earth when it has no trap? . . . can a Shofar sound in a city and the nation not tremble can there be evil in a city which God has not caused?” The point is that cause and effect are inextricably linked. Since God has chosen Amos as prophet, he must pronounce those prophecies (despite the protestations noted in 2:13): “For the LORD God will not do a thing unless He revealed His reason to his servants the prophets. When a lion roars, who could not fear, when the LORD speaks, who would not prophecy.” (3:8) However, Amos’s prophecies will be for naught: “They do not know how to do right, declares the LORD; they store violence and ruin in their fortresses.” (3:10) Therefore the people will be stripped of their splendor, and their fortresses plundered. Like the shepherd saves a limb from the devouring lion, the people will “rescue” their possessions, “with the leg of a bed or the head of a couch” (3:12, trans JPS).
- In Chapter 4 Amos bids that those who “defraud the poor and who oppress the needy” should listen to his warnings, because they will be exiled. Violations of sacrificial law are described. God has reproved the people through famines, droughts, blight and mildew, locusts, etc, “but you did not return to Me, declares the LORD.” (v. 9) Then there was pestilence, along with their firstborn being killed by the sword and their horses captured together with “the rising stench of your armies” (i.e. decaying) “but you did not return to Me, declares the LORD.” (v. 10) Destruction has been like God’s destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, “but you did not return to Me,

³⁹⁰ This is probably a reference to taking bribes. In many ways, this verse is reversed rhetorically in Amos 8:3 for an equally damning statement that the people buy the needy for silver, and the pauper for sandals.”

³⁹¹ Note that Exodus 22:24-26 requires that clothing taken as collateral for a loan must be returned at night. Deuteronomy 24:17 prohibits taking a widow’s clothing as collateral. Amos’s statement implies violations of these laws or perhaps more egregious violations of laws of lending.

³⁹² Nazarites are not permitted to drink wine.

- declares the LORD.” (v. 11) The people are told “. . . prepare to meet your God, Oh Israel.” (v. 12)
- 5:1-17: This prophecy opens with description of Israel’s impending fall, where there numbers will be cut down by 90%: “The city that goes out with 1,000 will have 100 remaining, the [city] that goes out with one hundred will be left with 10.” In a rare instance in Amos, the people are told that they can save themselves by returning to God. “For thus says the LORD God to the House of Israel: Seek me out and Live.”(5:4), though they are told not to go to Bethel, Gilgal or Beer Sheva (sites of sanctuaries), which will be destroyed. The chapter continues with an indictment of the corruption of the people, “who turn justice to wormwood and throw righteousness to the ground.” (v. 7) Because they have afflicted the poor, “ . . . you will build houses of hewn stone and not live in them, you will plant pleasing vineyards and not drink of their wine. For I know that your iniquities are great and your sins are plentiful; [you] who afflict the righteous, who take bribes, and cheat the paupers in the gate.³⁹³” (v. 11-12) There is again a call for repentance: “Seek good and not evil, so that you may live, and so that the Lord God of Hosts may be with you as you say. Hate evil and love good, and make justice in your gates, perhaps the Lord God of Hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.” (v. 14-15) The final verses of this prophecy (v. 16-17) foretells of people lamenting in the streets and crying “oy! oy!” “And in every vineyard [there will be] lamenting when I pass through your midst, says the LORD.”³⁹⁴
 - 5:18-27 speaks of the coming “Day of the Lord”,³⁹⁵ which is a time of profound darkness. Next, God denounces ritual observance in favor of just living³⁹⁶: “I hate and detest your festival offerings, and I will not be pleased (lit. ‘I will not smell’) your assembly offerings. If you bring up for me burnt offerings and meal offerings, I shall not accept them, and I will not turn to your gifts of fatlings. Remove from upon me your multitude of songs, and I will not listen the songs of your lutes. Let justice flow like water and righteousness as a mighty streem.” (5:21-24) Finally, God predicts that the people will carry off the idols which they had created as the people are exiled from the land.
 - Chapter 6 opens “Oy, you who feel secure in Zion, and who are confident in Shomron” – i.e. addressing the Northern and Southern kingdoms who believe that they are safe. The people are told that they will suffer destruction. The prophecy decries the oppulence of the people (v. 3-7) and says that the people will eventually be exiled and they will no longer bask in their fortune. “For behold, the LORD will command and will strike the great house into smithereens, and the small house into pieces.” (6:11) This chapter also includes a complaint about the corruption of the

³⁹³ Courts generally sat at the gate of the city.

³⁹⁴ Note that the words “oy! oy!” seem to for a segue between these past prophecies (which opened with “Hear this word” and the next two prophecies which open with the word “Oy!”

³⁹⁵ On “The Day of the Lord,” see above p. 75 footnote 170 and the crossreferenced in that footnote.

³⁹⁶ Whether the prophet intends to denounce ritual altogether, or to denounce ritual that does not come along with just living is a subject for debate.

society: “. . . you have turned justice on its head and the fruits of righteousness into wormwood.” (6:12)

- 7:1-9:6 autobiographical information about Amos including prophetic visions. Each vision (except for 9:1-6) in this section is introduced with the words “This is what the LORD God showed me, and behold . . .”
 - 7:1-6 describes two visions of Amos, one in which God brings a plague of locusts on the people, another where God attacks with fire. After each vision, Amos pleads with God for mercy. “LORD, please forgive, How can Israel survive, for he is small.”³⁹⁷ after which we are told, “The LORD relented on this, ‘It shall not be,’ said the LORD.”³⁹⁸
 - 7:7-9 presents another vision (stylistically similar to the vision in 8:1-3) in which God is seen standing holding a plumb line. God asks Amos what he sees, and when Amos says that he sees a plumbline, God says that he will apply a plumb line to the people,³⁹⁹ “I will no longer forgive them. The shrines of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined, and I will stand upon the House of Yiravam with a sword.” In this section, Amos does not beg God not to fulfill this prediction.
 - 7:10-17 interjects a story of the priest Amaziah in the temple at Bethel (where, presumably, Amos was operating). Amaziah sends a message to King Yiravam telling him that Amos is conspiring against him, in that Amos has said that Yiravam will die by the sword and Israel will be exiled. Amaziah tells Amos to flee to Judea. Amos tells Amaziah, “I am neither a prophet, nor the son of a prophet . . .” (7:14) explaining that he is not a professional prophet, but instead God took him from his regular profession (shepherding) and told him to prophecy. Amos predicts that because Amaziah has told Amos not to prophecy, Amaziah’s wife would be unfaithful and Amaziah’s children will die by the sword, and Amaziah would die outside of Israel.
 - 8:1-3 is another vision of Amos (stylistically similar to 7:7-9). Amos sees a bag of figs (*kayitz*, lit. “summer” meaning “summer fruit.”) Amos is asked what he sees, and says that he sees a bag of figs. God says that this signifies God saying that the end (*ketz*) is coming to Israel, where God will no longer forgive them.
 - The balance of Chapter 8 (v.4-14) is a compilation of prophetic sayings. It opens speaking of how people take advantage of the needy. They look forward to the opportunity to cheat people. “To buy the needy for silver, and the pauper for

³⁹⁷ The metaphor seems to be of a small Northern Kingdom (probably before Yiravam’s expansion” being attacked by many nations, p. 136 above, text accompanying footnote 385) (EJ).

³⁹⁸ Here we see Amos demonstrate one of the major roles of a prophet – that of interceding and asking God not to carry out God’s intent, just as, for example Abraham did regarding Sodom in Genesis 18:20-33 and Moses did for the People of Israel after the golden calf incident, see Exodus 32:11-14. Compare above p. 87 footnote 194 above and accompanying text where God asks Jeremiah not to intercede.

³⁹⁹ “Plumbline: a line (as of cord) that has at one end a weight (as a plumb bob) and is used especially to determine verticality” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/plumb+line>) – i.e. God will judge them strictly.

sandals.” (8:6)⁴⁰⁰ There must be a result of this evil, “Shall the earth not shake for this.” (8:8) God will take away the sun at noon (8:9).⁴⁰¹ Moreover, “Behold, days are coming, declares the LORD God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine for bread, and not a thirst for water, but rather [a thirst] to hear the word of the LORD. And people will wander from sea to sea, and from north to east they will roam in order to seek the word of the LORD and they will not find it.” (8:11-12)

- 9:1-6 presents another vision of destruction (this time not introduced with “This is what the LORD God showed me,” but instead “I saw”). Amos sees God standing upon the altar declaring that God will track down and punish/kill the people wherever they go, “If they go down to Sheol (the netherworld), from there my hand will take them, and if they go up to heaven from there I will bring them down . . . If they hide from before my eyes at the bottom of the sea, from there I will command the serpent and it will bite them.”
- 9:7-15 Prophecy of hope. As with most prophetic books, Amos closes with a message of hope. This piece begins by saying that Israel is no different than any other nation. “Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, Children of Israel, declares the LORD? Did I not lift up Israel out of Egypt and the Philistines from Caphtor, and Aram from Kir?” The history and geography of these people are not clear. However, there are two strong messages here: (1) that God cares for the wellbeing of all nations; and (2) that Israel is not so unique and therefore must rely on its own deeds to make it worthy of God’s graces.⁴⁰² God has Israel in God’s sites for destruction. However, “On that day” of destruction, “I will stand up the fallen booth (*sukah*) of David that has fallen . . .” (9:12) A day is coming where “The mountains will drip of wine and the hills will (9:13). “And I will return the captives of Israel and they will build their destroyed cities and inhabit them . . .” (9:14) “And I will plant them upon their land, and they will no longer be uprooted from their land which I have given to them, says the LORD your God.” (9:15)

d) Ovadiah

Note: As usual, this introduction is based on Encyclopedia Judaica “Amos” and the JPS Haftorah Commentary overview of Amos.

The book of Ovadiah (usually “Obadiah” in English) consists of only one chapter. The main theme of the book is the predicted fall of the people of Edom (Edom is another name for Esau who was Isaac’s son and Jacob’s brother). Edom is to be destroyed because it betrayed its brother (descendants of Jacob) during their downfall. The fall of Edom is predicted in Joel 4:19 and Amos 9:12, which perhaps accounts for the placement of Ovadiah after these books. Although some rabbinical sources seem to date Amos as a very early prophet, later scholars

⁴⁰⁰ In many ways, this verse is rhetorically the reverse of 2:6 (“they sold the just person for silver, and the pauper for sandals”), but is equally damning.

⁴⁰¹ See the first paragraph to the introduction to Amos, above, including footnotes, discussing the timing of Amos with certain earthquakes and eclipses.

⁴⁰² Note that the closing prophecy of Amos is the Haftorah when we read the Torah portion Kedoshim, which opens with the words “Speak to the Children of Israel and tell them ‘You shall be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.’” (Lev. 19:5)

(including Ibn Ezra and Nachmanides) observed that it seems that Amos is speaking after the fall of Jerusalem in 586.

A summary of Ovadiah (there is significant disagreement on how to break up Ovadiah into subsections, if at all).

The book opens with the words “The vision of Ovadiah: Thus sais the LORD God to Edom . . .” God says “I will make you the smallest of nations, most denigrated.” (1:2) Though Edom sees itself as powerful and untouchable, they are told, “Even if you nest as high as an eagle, and even if you put your nest between the stars, from there will I lower you, declares the LORD.” (1:4) “Because of the outrage [you perpetrated against] your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame and will be cut off forever. On the day where you stood across, on the day where foreigners captured its goods and heathens came through its gates and cast lots upon Jerusalem, you were as one of them.”⁴⁰³ (1:10-11) “The Day of the LORD⁴⁰⁴ is close upon all the nations, as you have done, it shall be done to you, your deeds shall be returned upon your head.” (1:15) But on Mount Zion there shall be a remnant which shall be holy . . . And the House of Jacob shall be a flame, and Esau (= Edom) the straw and they (Jacob) shall set fire to and devour them and there shall be no remnant to the House of Esau, for the LORD has spoken” (1:17-18) The balance of the book sees the exiles of the Israelites returning and repossessing the land of Israel, “And liberators shall come up to Zion to pass judgment⁴⁰⁵ upon the Mountain of Esau, and dominion will be the LORD’s.”

e) *Jonah*

Note: This introduction is based on Encyclopedia Judaica “Jonah” and the introduction to the JPS Bible Commentary on Jonah.

Unlike most books in the Prophets, The Book of Jonah centers less on actual prophecy, and more on the story of the prophet. As we are told in the first verse, Jonah is the story of the prophet Jonah son of Amitai, presumably the same prophet from the time of the second King Yeravam.⁴⁰⁶

In brief, the Book of Jonah tells about God telling Jonah to prophecy doom to the people of Ninveh. Jonah attempts to escape God’s command, but is unable to do so. Jonah goes to Ninveh, and the people repent from their evil deeds and are thus saved from destruction, much to the disappointment of Jonah. The book closes with God’s chastising Jonah for his disappointment.

⁴⁰³ The indication here (and found in other parts of the Bible) is that Edom participated in the plunder of Jerusalem during its downfall in 586.

⁴⁰⁴ On “The Day of the Lord,” see above p. 75 footnote 170 and the crossreferenced in that footnote.

⁴⁰⁵ The use of “pass judgment” (*lispot*) calls to mind the model of warrior/saviors of the book of Judges. See the introduction to Judges, above p. 49.

⁴⁰⁶ Mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25, see above p. 67 footnote 140and accompanying text. This would place Jonah in the 8th century, BCE.

Jonah is perhaps one of the most famous stories of the Bible, owing to the fact that a large fish swallowing a human and spitting it out is quite a tale for a young child. However, the story taught to Children (“You can’t avoid doing what God wants you to do”) masks the literary richness of the book, and the much more weighty philosophical points concerning why God and Jonah disagree regarding Jonah’s mission.

One of the main themes of Jonah is that of the balance between divine justice and mercy, and the ability of repentance to avert the destruction of the evildoer. This is Jonah’s great objection to his mission: He feels it unfair that a sinner can “get away” with their sins through repentance.⁴⁰⁷ God answers that the power of repentance owes to God’s compassion for God’s creations. Although repentance is clearly a theme of Jonah, it is notable that this theme really begins to play out in the third and fourth chapters, only after telling us much about Jonah’s attempt to escape his mission, which makes it hard to describe repentance as “the” theme of the book. Another, theme of Jonah is the inability to escape God’s will. Perhaps the unity of these themes comes from God’s attacking Jonah for attempting to avoid God’s command. As the JPS Bible Commentary puts it in its introduction, “If Jonah is to be rid of the notion that divine compassion expresses weakness of mind and softness of heart, he must experience the Lord’s heavy hand directed against himself. He must realize that the God who shows clemency to malefactors makes no concessions to His prophet – who pretends to know better than his God how the world should be conducted.”⁴⁰⁸

One fascinating aspect of the Book of Jonah is its attitude toward non-Israelites. God commands Jonah to prophecy to the people of Nineveh, who are not Israelites, demonstrating God’s concern for all of humanity. In many ways, the non-Jews in the story understand God better than the prophet Jonah does. In fact, some argue that Jonah refuses his mission because he fears that these non-Israelites would be too quick to repent, thus making the “stiff necked” Israel look bad (I am not at all convinced that this is Jonah’s concern). Additionally, as Jonah attempts to escape by boat, the people on the boat are possessed of remarkable divine awareness and moral sensitivity.⁴⁰⁹

Another interesting literary point is that the motivation for Jonah’s flight from God’s mission is not revealed to us until the final chapter, although we know that Jonah expressed his reservations to God at the outset⁴¹⁰, tempting us to believe that Jonah flees because of fear of rejection, failure, and/or attack.⁴¹¹ Ironically, it turns out that Jonah’s fear was that his mission would succeed.

⁴⁰⁷ Note that Ezekiel responded to those who objected to the power of repentance in Ezekiel chapters 18 and 33 of Ezekiel. See above p. 112, footnote 281 and text accompanying.

⁴⁰⁸ JPS Bible Commentary, Jonah, p. xii.

⁴⁰⁹ See below footnote 414 and accompanying text.

⁴¹⁰ See on 4:2, below footnote 423 and accompanying text.

⁴¹¹ See, for example, Moses’ reticence to the divine mission revealed to him at the burning bush, as Moses fears the people will not listen to him, see Exodus chapters 3 and 4. See also Jeremiah Chapter 1, discussed above p. 87, text accompanying footnote 196.

Another recurrent theme of Jonah is God's absolute power over nature, causing storms, growing trees, directing the sun and wind (and fish).

Scholars are quite uncertain as to the date the Book of Jonah was written. Opinions vary from the 8th to the 3rd Century BCE (see EJ)

A review of the contents of Jonah:

- Chapters 1: Jonah's Call and Flight: Jonah opens with God calling Jonah to go to Nineveh and "cry out against it, for its evils have ascended before me."⁴¹² Jonah boards a boat to flee to Tarshish.⁴¹³ On the way, God causes a storm (perhaps just great waves) which threatens to destroy the ship. The people on the boat throw cargo overboard and begin to pray to their gods, while Jonah, presumably resigned to death, goes to sleep below deck. Jonah is wakened by the captain who tells him to pray to his God, "perhaps . . . [God] will give us an idea and we won't perish." (1:6). The people on the ship draw lots to see which of them is "at fault" for this storm (realizing that this storm was a form of divine retribution). The lot falls on Jonah, who explains that he is "a Hebrew" who "fears the LORD, God of the Heavens" (1:9) and also indicated that he was running away from God (1:10). Upon hearing of Jonah's religious loyalties, "the men fear greatly," and ask him his transgression. The people ask Jonah what they can do to protect themselves, and Jonah tells them to throw him overboard, and then "the sea will be quiet." The people struggle further to get back to shore, and then beg God's forgiveness for what they must do: "Please, LORD, let us not perish on account of this man, and do not place [guilt] upon us for innocent blood, because you, LORD, do as you please." (1:14) Upon jettisoning Jonah, the water goes quiet, and "The men feared the LORD greatly and made sacrifices to the LORD and made vows." (1:15)⁴¹⁴
- Chapter 2: Jonah in the Fish: God "appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish for three days and three nights." (2:1)⁴¹⁵ Jonah prays to God. The prayer is a prayer of thanksgiving to God, and lacks any statement of contrition or request for forgiveness or deliverance (2:3).⁴¹⁶ Jonah expresses that he cried out to God and God answered him. "When my soul was wanng, to the LORD I called, and my prayer came to you, to your holy Temple." (2:8) "And I will sacrifice before you with

⁴¹² The language here echoe's God's reference to Sodom to "the outcry that has come before me." (Gen. 18:21)

⁴¹³ The location of Tarshish is uncertain, but it seems to be across the Mediteranian, in very much an opposite direction as Nineveh (a large city in Mesopotamia).

⁴¹⁴ The religious awareness of those on the ship is remarkable. They "fear greatly" when they find out Jonah's religious loyalties. Rather than immediately accepting Jonah's suggestion to throw him overboard, they do so only after more valiant efforts to get the ship to shore, and with prayers that God not punish them for their act. Upon the water's calming, they are inspired to fear of God, sacrifices and vows. There is great irony here. Jonah, who flees God's mission, happens to bring religious inspiration to the people on the ship.

⁴¹⁵ Note the irony: Unlike Jonah, the fish accepts God's commission!

⁴¹⁶ Note that many scholars argue that the text of the prayer was added to the Book of Jonah later, although this contention is far from certain (see EJ on Jonah, compare JPS Bible Commentary on Jonah p. xxxiii-xxv and its introduction to Chapter 2, p. 15-18).

loud thanksgiving, as I vowed I will fulfill, salvation is the LORD's!" (2:10) Verse 2:11 tells us, "And the LORD commanded the fish and it spit Jonah to dry land."⁴¹⁷

- Chapter 3: Jonah's Recommission and Prophecy to Nineveh. God again tells Jonah to go to Nineveh, "and declare the declaration that I tell you." This time, Jonah goes to Nineveh. Nineveh is described as a huge city, a three day walk from end to end. Jonah walks in one day's worth and declares, "another forty days and Nineveh will be overturned." (3:4) The people of Nineveh believe in God and react with fasting, and wearing sackcloth (3:5). The King of Nineveh hears about the prophecy and he, too, dons sackcloth. (3:6) He orders the entire city (man and beast) to fast and wear sackcloth^{418, 419} "and call out loudly to God and repent each person from his evil ways and from the violence on their hands. Who knows, God [may] turn back and repent, and will remove his wrath (lit. "flaming nostrils") and we won't perish."⁴²⁰ (3:8-9) God sees that the people have turned back from their evil ways, "and God repented from the evil which he had spoken to do to them, and did not do so."⁴²¹ (3:10)
- Chapter 4: Jonah's argument with God. Jonah is quite displeased with the situation, "And he prayed to the LORD saying: 'Please, LORD, is this not what I said while I was on my own land?! This is why I rushed to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you are a compassionate and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in kindness and who repents from evil.'⁴²² Now, please take my soul from me, for my death is preferable to my life.'" (4:2-4) Now we know what Jonah had feared all along.⁴²³ Jonah leaves the city and pitches a tent (well, as sukkah, actually) in order to watch what would happen to Nineveh. God appoints a tree⁴²⁴ which grew above Jonah to be shade for him.⁴²⁵ Jonah is quite

⁴¹⁷ Note that if Jonah's prayer is taken as a parenthetical, the entire fish story would read, "And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish for three days and three nights. And Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish. And the LORD commanded the fish and it spit Jonah to dry land."

⁴¹⁸ The King's religious awareness is remarkable. He does not dismiss the prophecy, nor does he presume that all is lost. Instead, he declares a program of religious and ethical reform designed to change his peoples' faith.

⁴¹⁹ Yes, the animals are to wear sackcloth as well! JPS (on 3:8) point out that, for example, animals that have saddles can have less ornate saddles.

⁴²⁰ The King's words are reminiscent of the Captain telling Jonah to pray to his God, "perhaps . . . [God] will give us an idea and we won't perish." (Jonah 1:6) The same word will be used later in 4:10.

⁴²¹ The words of 3:10 unmistakably echo the words that describe when Moses convinced God not to destroy the Israelites after the Golden Calf incident: "And the LORD repented from the evil which he had spoken to do to his nation." (Ex. 32:14) Also strikingly similar to Jeremiah's promise, "Now, improve your ways and your misdeeds, and hearken to the voice of the LORD your God, and the LORD will repent for the evil that he has spoken to do to you." (Jeremiah 26:13). There are numerous other occurrences in the Bible of God "repenting from the evil" which God planned. See also Jeremiah 18:7-10 which discusses a nation's ability to avoid a bad fate through repentance.

⁴²² For the relationship between this phrase and the "Thirteen Attributes" recited on Yom Kippur from Exodus 34:6-7 as well as other related Biblical verses, see above on Joel 2:13, p. 134 footnote 377 and accompanying text.

⁴²³ A concern which Jonah tells us he had expressed to God earlier, although the narrator kept that conversation from us!

⁴²⁴ Note the same language as God appointing the fish in 2:1. The tree is called a *kikayon* tree. The translation is uncertain.

happy about the tree, until God “appoints” a worm that attacks the tree which whithers. As the sun shines, God “appoints” a easterly wind and Jonah is brought near death, for which Jonah begs. God questions Jonah about his anger about the loss of the tree, and the book closes with God’s words, “ . . . do you care so much about the *kikayon* which you did not work for, nor grow, which was for a day and then by night perished?”⁴²⁶ And I should not care about Nineveh, the great city which has in it more than twelve myriads of men who know not between their right and their left, as well as many beasts.”⁴²⁷(4:10-11)

f) *Micah*

Note: As usual, this introduction is based on Encyclopedia Judaica “Micah” and the JPS Haftorah Commentary overview of Micah.

According to the opening verses of Micah, Micah Prophesied in the late eighth and early seventh century, during the reigns of kings Yotam, Achaz, and Chizkiyahu in Judah. He prophesied concerning coming doom to Jerusalem and Samaria (Capital of the Northern Kingdom). This makes him a contemporary of Isaiah. From Jeremiah 26:18, we learn that Micah’s prophecies were still significant close to a century later, when, it is mentioned during the trial of Jeremiah during the beginning of Yehoyachim’s reign (608 B.C.E.).⁴²⁸

The Book of Micha in many way reflects the book of Isaiah, sharing a common critique of the perversions of justice of the time of these prophets. Micah is familiar with the workings of the powerful of his time, and also of the activities of other prophets. He repeatedly complains about the actions of the rulers and the wealthy. However, there is no indication that he had the access to the people of power that Isaiah did.

Although Micha operates as God’s voice, using formulas such as “Thus says the LORD,” and “declares the LORD,” these phrases are used infrequently, and it often appears that he is speaking in his own voice.

There are three main sections of Micah. Part 1 (Chapters 1-3) is a series of oracles of judgment against Samaria and Jerusalem. Part 2 (Chapters 4-5) is prophecies of consolation. Part 3 (Chapters 6-7) is an indictment of the wrongs of the past and instructions for the future. The final part of Chapter 7 returns to the theme of promise and restoration, like the material in Part 2.

Micah’s focus is almost exclusively on social injustice, as opposed to cultic misdeeds. His preachings also have the theme that we have seen in most prophets, the ingathering of a

⁴²⁵ It is not clear why this is necessary above the sukkah Jonah had made. It is possible that this formed supplemental shade, or that the covering of the sukkah had dried out.

⁴²⁶ The word for “perish” is the same as used by the ship captain in 1:6, and by the King in 3:9.

⁴²⁷ The message is clear: God has mercy on his creatures, even if this mercy isn’t the letter of the law from a justice standpoint. The reference to “men who know not between their right and their left” is not entirely clear. This could refer to adults who have “lost their moral compass.” Others argue that this is a reference to the children of Nineveh, who, along with the animals, would be undeserving victims of the downfall of Nineveh.

⁴²⁸ Jeremiah 26:18, see above p. 95 text accompanying footnote 223.

righteous remnant. Also, he reflects a future where Zion would be a religious center of a new world order.⁴²⁹

A review of the content of Micah:

- Part 1: Chapters 1-3: Oracles of Judgment against Samaria and Jerusalem.
- 1:1 Introduction. The section is introduced as, “the Words of the LORD that was to Micah the Morashite, in the days of Yotam, Achaz, (and) Yechizkiyah, Kings of Judah, which he saw regarding Samaria and Jerusalem.”
 - 1:2-7: Prophecy of destruction. Micah bids, “Here, all nations, pay heed the Earth and all it holds, and let the LORD God be your accuser, the LORD from his sanctified abode” (1:2). God will come down and bring destruction. The mountains will melt, and the valleys split. All this destruction is because of the sins of Israel and Judah.
 - 1:8-16: Lamentations for future destruction of towns. “For this I will lament and weep and wail . . .” (1:8). “I will bring an inheritor to you (to inherit, i.e. capture your land), inhabitants of Mareshah, the glory of Israel shall set at Adullam. Cut hair and shave for the children of your joy; make yourself bald as a vulture, for they have been exiled from you.” (1:16)
 - 2:1-16: Ruin to beset an immoral people. “Woe, those who plan evil and do wrong upon their beds, for when they wake in the morning they do it (the evil they planned the night before) because they have the power.” (2:1) They seize houses, and cheat a person out of house and land. God plans the destruction of such people. There is some suggestion that this section refers to the Judaean kingdom trying to take land from the Northern kingdom. The chapter ends with a hope of reunification: “I shall gather in Jacob, all of you, I will collect the remnant of Israel, and place it together like sheep of Botzrah . . .” (2:12).
 - 3:1-12: Condemnation of Rulers and Prophets. Chapter 3 opens with Micah speaking in first-person: “And I said, listen, rulers of Jacob and chieftans of Israel, aren’t you responsible to know justice? Haters of good and lovers of evil, who steal their skin from upon them, and their flesh off their bones.” (3:1-2) “Then (i.e. in the future) they will cry out to the LORD and (God) will not answer them, and will hide his face from them at that time, just as they have wrought their evil.” (3:4)⁴³⁰ 3:5 shifts focus to the (false) prophets “who lead my people astray.” These prophets will experience “a night from prophecy, and darkness from divination” (3:6). “However,” Micah proclaims, “I am filled with strength from the divine spirit, justice and courage in order to tell Jacob of its iniquities and Israel of its sins.” (3:8). The prophet then returns to condemnation of the “rulers of the house of Jacob and chieftans of the house of Israel, who pervert justice and who bend all that is straight. Who build Zion through bloodshed and Jerusalem with iniquity,” (3:9-10). The prophet speaks of Jerusalem, saying “Her rulers judge by bribes, her Priests give rulings for a fee, and

⁴²⁹ The idea of all nations worshipping God at the Temple in Jerusalem is prominent in a number of prophetic works. See the introductions to Isaiah, above p. 72, Haggai, below p. 155, and Zechariah, below p. 157. See also Jeremiah Chapter 3, p. 88 footnote 201 and accompanying text.

⁴³⁰ On the metaphor of God “Hiding God’s face” see above p. 84 footnote 189 and accompanying text.

her perophtets divine for money, yet they (the rulers, priests, and prophets) rely on the LORD saying: ‘Isn’t the LORD in our midst, no evil will beset us.’” (3:11) Indeed, Jerusalem will be destroyed (3:12)

- Part 2: Chapters 4-6: Prophecies of consolation.
 - 4:1-5 Consolation for Zion I. 4:1-3 is almost exactly the same as Isaiah 2:2-4,⁴³¹ which are perhaps the most famous words of hope for the future, speaking of how “at the end of days” all nations would come to worship God in Jerusalem, how “Torah will come from Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem,” (4:2) and how God would judge the nations (i.e. punishing the evil and rewarding the good), and “they will beat swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not raise a sword against a nation, and they will no longer know war.” (4:3) We are told that “on that day,” God will gather the exiles, “and the LORD shall reign upon them from Mount Zion from that time and for ever.” (4:7). We are told that the original monarchy (i.e. the Davidic dynasty) would return to power (4:8-9). 4:10-14 speaks to Zion (Jerusalem), who will defeat her enemies, “Arise, thresh o Zion, for I will make your horns iron, and your hoofs I will make bronze, and you will crush many nations and you will gather their booty to the LORD, and their wealth to the master of all the earth.” (4:13) At the opening of Chapter 5, the focus shifts to Bethlahem (King David’s birthplace, see 1 Samuel 16), out of whom a powerful ruler of Israel would come. Israel would dwell securely, and would dominate Assyria. Finally, these prophecies of restoration turn to the people of Israel, saying, “And the remant of Jacob will be among the many nations as dew from the LORD, like drops on blades of grass who do not hope in man nor wait in hope for the sons of man . . . (they will be) as a lion among the animals of the field, like a young lion among flocks of sheep . . .” (5:6-7). On that Day, God would destroy the peoples’ chariots and fortresses, would remove sorcerers and soothsayers, and destroy their idols and pillars. (5:9-13) This, presumably, would be done so that people would rely on God (per 5:6). God will destroy in anger all nations that do not obey God’s commandments (5:14).
 - Part 3: Chapters 6-7: Indictment of the wrongs of the past and instructions for the future. Chapter 6 opens with Micah essentially presenting God’s complaints about Israel. “Hear Oh mountains, the LORD’s claim . . . for the LORD has a complaint with His nation, and a suit against Israel.” (6:2)⁴³² God says how God took Israel out of Egypt, and “and sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.”⁴³³ God reminds the people how God protected them from Bilam’s attempt to curse them⁴³⁴ The people are presented as responding with questions of how they can please God, to which the prophet responds, “[God] has told you, oh man, what is good, and what the LORD asks of you, only to do justice and love righteousness, and to walk humbly with your God.” (6:8). The next verses describe the depravity of the people, their use of unjust scales, the lawlessness of their rich people,

⁴³¹ Which text copied from the other, or did each copy from somewhere else?

⁴³² It is a common metaphor for parts of the earth to be called to bare witness to God’s testimonies and complaints.

⁴³³ This mention of Miriam along with Moses and Aaron as leaders of the people in the wilderness is quite remarkable.

⁴³⁴ See Numbers 22 and following.

their dishonesty, etc. God, too, has punished the people, who do not have enough food to eat, they plant without having the chance to reap (presumably the crops being taken by enemies). “You followed the laws of Omri⁴³⁵ and all the deeds of the House of Ahab⁴³⁶, and you followed their guidance, so that I may make you desolate, and her⁴³⁷ inhabitants objects of hissing and bear the mockery of my people.” (6:16) Chapter 7 presents a prophetic lament over the evils of the people “Woe is me . . . the pious [person] has disappeared from the land, and there is no forthright [person] among people . . .” (7:1-2). No one can trust anyone else, “Do not trust a friend . . . for a son deals disgracefully with his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a bride (rises up) against her mother-in-law – a man’s enemies are the people of his household.” “But I,” says Micah, “will look to the LORD, will wait for the God of my salvation, my God will hear me. Do not rejoice over me, my enemies, for [although] I fall, I will rise; although I sit in darkness, the LORD is my light.” (7:8) 7:9-13 presents a contrite speaker (representing Israel, presumably) accepting God’s punishment for wrongdoing, but hopeful that God will eventually champion the speaker’s cause, then, “I will see my enemy, and she will be covered with shame; [the enemy] who said to me, ‘where is the LORD your God’⁴³⁸, my eyes will see in her [downfall], she will be trampled like outdoor mud.” (7:10) The book of Micah closes with a prayer (presumably by Micah) asking God to “shepherd your people with your staff . . .” and speaks of wonders like those that occurred during the exodus from Egypt. The final verses praise God’s capacity for forgiveness: “Who is a God like You, who bears iniquity and ignores transgressions; for the remnant of His people He does not hold on to his anger forever, because He loves graciousness. Let Him return to love us, to cover our iniquities and to cast (*v’tashlich*) all of our sins into the depths of the sea. Give faithfulness to Jacob and graciousness to Abraham, as you promised to our ancestors in days of old.”⁴³⁹

g) Nahum

Note: As usual, this introduction is based on Encyclopedia Judaica “Nahum.” As no part of Nahum is used for a Haftorah, the JPS Haftorah Commentary does not have an introduction on this work.

Nothing is known about Nahum except that he is described in the opening verse of the book as “an Eshkolite.” The location of this town is unclear. Based on an allusion to the capture of the Egyptian Tehebes by Ashurbanipal, we can date Nahum to after the year 663 B.C.E. Nahum preaches about the downfall of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, which was the oppressive empire

⁴³⁵ A king of the Northern Kingdom, who apparently created socially oppressive laws. See Encyclopedia Judaica “Omri.”

⁴³⁶ Also a King of the Northern Kingdom.

⁴³⁷ Probably a reference to Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom.

⁴³⁸ We again see the notion that misfortunes which beset the Jewish people may reflect negatively on God’s image. See above p. 113, footnote 286 and accompanying text, and p. 121, footnote 314 and accompanying text, and p. 134 text accompanying footnote 378.

⁴³⁹ These final verses are traditionally recited during the Tashlich service on Rosh Hashanah, as part the final words of the Haftorah at Mincha on Yom Kippur, and in some traditions as part of the Haftorah on Shabbat Shuva.

that dominated Judah and most of the area. That fall occurred in August 612, though scholars are not certain if Nahum is written before or after that date. The fall of Nineveh is thought to be foretold in a manner with “expressions normally used in depicting the cultic-mythical struggle of God against his foes.” (EJ, expressing the view of A. Haldar) The defeat of Nineveh is a demonstration of God’s “moral government of the world,” as the Avenger of wrongdoers and the sole source of security to those who trust in Him.” (EJ)

A review of the content of Nahum:

- Chapter 1 is thought to have originally been a complete acrostic hymn of theophany.⁴⁴⁰ It describes God as vicious and vengeful, but at the same time saying, “The LORD is slow to anger and of great power, who does not forgive iniquity . . .” (1:2)⁴⁴¹ God’s presence is pictured as an interruption of everything in nature: “The mountains tremble from Him, and the hills melt, the earth flees from before Him, [as does] the land and all who dwell on her.” (1:5) “Before His wrath who can stand? And who will remain at the flaring of His anger. His rage pours out like fire, and rocks are shattered by Him.” (1:6) God is a refuge to those who turn to God, but God destroys God’s enemies.
- Chapter 2 opens with a message of hope for Judah: “Behold upon the mountains, the footsteps of a messenger⁴⁴², who announces peace, celebrate, Judah, your celebrations,

⁴⁴⁰ Theophany: I.e. a physical vision of God.

⁴⁴¹ The relationship of this text to the famed “Thirteen Attributes” recited on Yom Kippur from Exodus 34:6-7 “ . . . The LORD, the LORD is a compassionate and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in kindness and truth . . .”) and to Num. 34:18 (“The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in kindness . . .”) is clear. Also related is Joel 2:13: “the LORD your God for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abundant in kindness, and repents from evil,” see above p. 134 text accompanying footnote 377, and Jonah 4:2: “you are a compassionate and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in kindness and who repents from evil,” See above p. 145 and text accompanying footnote 422. Interestingly, the phrase stating describing God as “ונקַה לֹא נָקַת” (a Yoda-ism meaning “remit, God does not remit (punishment)) is prodigious throughout the Bible (Ex. 34:7, Num. 14:8, 1 Samuel 26:9, Jeremiah 30:11, Nahum 1:3), particularly together with phraseology as to how God is “abundant in kindness,” etc (Ex, Num., Nahum). Only Joel and Jeremiah (which we read as the Haftorah on Yom Kipur) explicitly mention in these verses that God “repents from evil” – i.e. that God refrains from punishment (at least in the instance of repentance). This is not to say that Jeremiah and Jonah were exclusive in the belief that God can decide against punishment. After the Golden Calf, Moses pleads, “Return from the wrath of your anger, and repent from the evil [that you have declared] upon your nation.” (Ex. 32:12). In our High Holiday liturgy, when we recite the 13 divine attributes from Exodus 34, we say God is “The LORD, the LORD is a compassionate and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in kindness and truth . . . who bares sin, iniquity and misdeed, נָקַת”- i.e. God does remit punishment, conveniently leaving out the final part of the phrase in Exodus “לֹא נָקַת” that God does not remit punishment. **Note: when this text is put online, this footnote will be deleted in favor of the following footnote (the rest of the footnote will be found in the discussion on Joel 2:13).**

⁴⁴³ For the relationship between this phrase and the “Thirteen Attributes” recited on Yom Kippur from Exodus 34:6-7 as well as other related Biblical verses, see above on Joel 2:13, p. 134 footnote 377 and accompanying text.

⁴⁴² This verse is strikingly similar to Isaiah 55:7, “How pleasing on the mountains are the footsteps of the messenger, who announces peace and tells of good, who announces salvation and says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”

fulfill your vows (i.e. bring any gifts you have vowed to the Temple), for no longer will the evildoer invade you, they have entirely vanished.” (2:1). The chapter describes (or predicts) a crazed scene of battle and plunder in Nineveh. “Nineveh was like still water throughout her days, but [now] they flee, “stop stop⁴⁴³,” but no one turns around.” (2:9) “Desolate! Devastated! Destroyed! The heart sinks, knees knock, stomachs are upset, and all their faces turn pale.” (2:11)

- Chapter 3 continues the description of Nineveh’s downfall, together with speaking of the evil that occurred in the city, for example “Woe, the bloody city, completely treacherous, filled with violence, where killing never stops.” (2:1) Nineveh is compared to a harlot, and told that she will be buried in disgusting items, and made a spectacle of (2:4-6). “And every one who sees you will recoil from you, and say “Nineveh ahs been destroyed,” who will comfort her, from where will I find consolers for her.” Reference is made to the fall of Tehebes,⁴⁴⁴ which was defeated by Assyria despite its well defended and had many allies. “You, too, will be drunk and disappear, you too will seek refuge from the enemy.” (3:11) The book closes: “There is no healing for your wounds, your injury is fatal, all who hear what is to be heard about you will clap hands over you, for upon whom has your evil not befallen constantly?” (3:19)

h) Habakuk

Note: As usual, this introduction is based on Encyclopedia Judaica “Habakuk” and the JPS Haftorah Commentary overview of Habakuk.

Habakuk is a small prophetic book with 3 chapters. The book gives us only one historic reference point, which is the mention of the ascendancy of the Babylonian (Chaldean) empire (Hab. 1:6) which would later destroy the Temple in Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. Based on this, it is likely that Habakuk dates to around 600 B.C.E. The first chapter of Habakuk contains a set of two complaints toward God about God’s inaction in the face of evil, which are set around a divine pronouncement. The second chapter is a prophecy of coming destruction of evil. The third chapter is a prayer expressing confidence in God’s future response to evil.

The main theme of Habakuk is dealing with God’s reaction to evil. Unlike the book of Job, there is a concrete (though, perhaps, unsatisfactory) response to the questions of divine inaction. There is an interesting tension in that the Babylonian empire is both the tool of God’s vengeance for evildoers, but that the Babylonians themselves are evildoers who will be punished.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴³ Apparently this phrase describes a person or people telling people not to flee, and perhaps instead to fight.

⁴⁴⁴ Also referred to in Jeremiah 46:25 per a footnote in the JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh.

⁴⁴⁵ We have seen before the concept that God uses evil empires as tools of God’s destruction of other evildoers. See e.g. Isaiah 10, discussed above at p. 74, and Ezekiel 21, above at p. 114. In fact, Deuteronomy sees the Israelite conquest of Canaan as a tool of God’s punishment for evildoers, “Do not speak in your heart when God destroys them from before you, ‘Because of my righteousness the LORD brought me to inherit this land,’ – it is because of the evil of these nations the LORD dispossesses them (of the land) before you.” (Deut 9:4)

- Chapter 1: Complaints of evil
 - 1:2-4 presents the prophet's complaint about divine inaction in the face of evil. "For how long, O Lord, shall I call out and you not listen, scream to you, "violence," and you not save?" (1:2) Justice is perverted, ". . . because the evildoer surrounds the righteous . . ." (1:4)
 - 1:5-11 presents God's prediction of destruction coming from the Babylonians. God says, "Look among the nations, see and be shocked, for I shall do something during your days, that [you] would not believe if I told you." (1:5) God says, "I will lift up the Chaldeans (Babylonians), the fierce and impetuous nation" (1:6) who will bring terror and destruction. The function of this section is not clear. Is God responding to the complaints of 1:2-4 by saying that the Babylonians will bring retribution for the evil (in which case why the additional complaints in 1:12-17) or is this God's prediction of evil that leads the prophet to the complaints found in 1:2-4 and 1:12-17?
 - 1:12-17 is another complaint about God's inaction in the face of evil. The prophet speaks of God an eternal God and a God of justice, but asks (in a fascinating statement), "You whose eyes are too pure to look upon evil and you are not capable witnessing evil, why do you watch treachery, (why are you) silent when the evil swallows one more righteous than he." (1:13)
- Chapter 2: Habakuk's request for divine response and God's response. Chapter 2 opens with Habakuk saying, "I shall stand my watch, and keep my post, and wait to see what [God] will say to me, and what God will respond regarding my rebuke." In 2:2 Habakuk says "the Lord answered me and said . . .". Babylonia will suffer a precipitous destruction. "Because you plundered many nations, all remaining nations will plunder you; because of the human bloodshed and violence to the earth, city, and her inhabitants." (2:8) 2:9-20 continues the pronouncement against Babylonia with pronouncements beginning with the word "*Hoy*" (woe, Oh!) for example, "*Hoy*, who builds towns with bloodshed, and establishes a city with treachery. Is it not from the LORD of Hosts that people shall labor in fire, and nations should tire themselves for nothing? For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD just as water covers the sea." (2:12-14)
- Chapter 3: Habakuk's prayer. Chapter 3 begins, "A prayer of Habakuk the prophet, upon the Shigionoth."⁴⁴⁶ Habakuk speaks of God's power and God's compassion (3:2). In 3:3-15 the Habakuk speaks confidently of God's coming, together with brilliant light, earthquakes, pestilence, storms, etc. . . . i.e. God's use of natural phenomena as part of God's awesome force.⁴⁴⁷ In 3:16-19 Habakuk is struck with a terrible vision, but maintains his faith, "I heard, and my stomach turned, my lips trembled at the sound, rot entered my bones . . . but I was calm concerning the day of distress, for the arrival of a nation to attack us." The book closes: "But I will rejoice in the LORD, celebrate the God of my salvation," the LORD God is my soldier who makes my feet as deer's, and leads me upon the heights – For the leader, with instruments.⁴⁴⁸"(3:18-19)

⁴⁴⁶ Shigion is probably a style of prayer or music.

⁴⁴⁷ This in some ways begs the question . . . why does God use evil nations as tools for retribution, rather than God's power over natural phenomena.

⁴⁴⁸ A musical instruction probably as a bookend to the earlier mention of *Shigionoth*.

i) *Zephaniah*

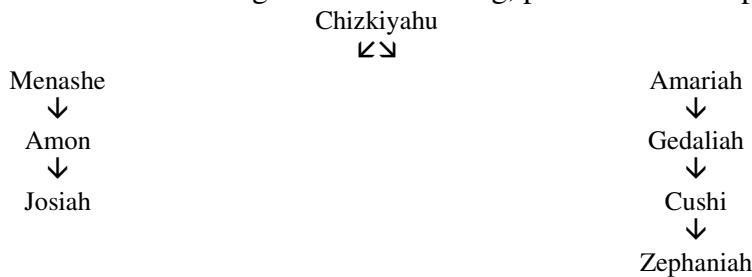
Note: As usual, this introduction is based on *Encyclopedia Judaica* “Zephania.” As no part of Nahum is used for a Haftorah, the JPS Haftorah Commentary does not have an introduction on this work.

The first verse of Zephania tells us that Zephania prophesied during the reign of Josiah son of Amon in Judah (who reigned from 640-609 B.C.E.). We are given Zephania’s lineage, tracing back to “Chizkiyah,” in which case zephania was Josiah’s 2nd cousin, once removed.⁴⁴⁹ Recall that Josiah reformed Judaean practice to be more in line with God’s expectations, as opposed to his predecessors, who had allowed significant influence of other religions (see 2 Kings 21 and following, above p. 69). Meanwhile, it is during Josiah’s reign that the Assyrian empire is breaking up, leading to the political instability and feeding visions of an approaching Day of the LORD.⁴⁵⁰ Zephania is characterized by prophecies of doom and destruction, but ends with a powerful prophecy of better times in the future.

A review of the content of Zephaniah:

- Chapter 1: God says that God will remove everything from the world – from human to animals. God will remove all vestiges of worship of *baal* (a pagan God) from Judah and those who worship false-gods, “and those who forsake the LORD, and do not ask for the LORD nor seek Him.” “Hush before the LORD God, for the Day of the LORD is near, for the LORD has prepared a *zevach*, purified his guests.”⁴⁵¹ (1:7) On the day of this *zevach* God will punish all the leaders and officers “who fill the palace of their master (i.e. Josiah) with violence and deceit.”⁴⁵² Ironically, just sentences after the statement “Hush before the LORD,” we are told of screams that will come with this destruction (1:10-11). “At that time,” God will punish all those who thought their deeds were without consequence, “saying to themselves, God will do neither good nor evil.” (1:12) They will lose their wealth, “they will build houses and not inhabit them, and plant vineyards and

⁴⁴⁹ For information on the reign of King Josiah, see above on 2 Kings 22 and following, p.70. King Chizkiyah is discussed on 2 Kings 18 and following, p.69. As to the apparent family tree:



⁴⁵⁰ On the Day of the Lord, see footnote 170, p. 75 and the crossreferenced in that footnote.

⁴⁵¹ The verse seems to have a certain *double entendre*. The word *zevach* can refer to the slaughtering of an animal, but also means a sacrificial meal (for which participants would have to be purified). Basically, the verse indicates God’s slaughtering God’s enemies, and feasting with those who are loyal to God.

⁴⁵² Per the JPS Tanakh, the “master” referenced here is Josiah.

not drink their wine.”⁴⁵³ (1:13) This “Day of the Lord will be of complete darkness and distress: “A day of wrath is that day, a day of woe and trouble, a day of calamity (*shoah*) and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and *arafel*.⁴⁵⁴ A day of shofar and horns, upon the fortified cities and the high places.”⁴⁵⁵ (1:15-16)

- Chapter 2 is a prediction of doom for Judea, with an exhortation for the righteous to remain righteous, and perhaps survive for a better tomorrow. This idea is then supported by oracles of destruction for those who threaten Judea.
 - 2:1-3 is a prophecy to Judah, who are implored that before the impending doom, “Seek the LORD, all humble (people) of the land, who follow the law, seek justice, seek righteousness, perhaps you will be hidden on the day of the LORD’s anger.
 - 2:4-7 is a prediction of doom for the coastal inhabitants, who would often present rivalry and danger to the Judean kingdom, “Azah shall be abandoned, and Ashkelon desolate, Ashdod will be exiled at noon, and Ekron will be uprooted.” (2:4) These lands will become pasture land for Judah.
 - In 2:8-11 God predicts destruction of Moav and Amon, who will be put into place for their haughtiness. “Therefore, as I live declares the LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that Moav shall be as Sodom, and the sons of Amon as Gemorah . . . the remnant of my people will plunder them, the remainder of my nation will possess them.” (2:9)
 - 2:12-15 makes passing reference to the destruction of the Cushite people and then goes on to speak of the destruction of Assyria and its capital Nineveh⁴⁵⁶, “This celebratory city, which sits securely, which says in her heart, ‘I am, and there is no other,’ how she has/will become waste, a lair of beasts, whoever passes her will scream and wave his hand.” (2:15)
 - Chapter 3 opens with further prophecy of doom of Jerusalem in retribution for misdeeds, but closes with a message of hope for the righteous remnant that would remain. “She did not listen to the voice (i.e. what God was saying), she did not take advice, she did not trust in the LORD, to her God she did not draw near. Her officials are roaring lions in her midst, her judges are wolves of the evening, leaving nothing for the morning. Her prophets are reckless, treacherous people, her priests profaned the holy and perverted Torah.” (3:2-4) God tried to get them to turn to the right path, but to no avail. God bids the people to wait for the time that God will gather all peoples, “to pour out upon them all my wrath . . .” “But I will leave in your midsts a poor and humble folk, who will take refuge in the name of the LORD. A remnant of Israel who do no wrong, and do not speak deceitfully, nor is found on their tongue the language of falsehood, and they shall graze and lie down with no one to trouble them.” (3:12-13) 3:14 begins a joyous song by the prophet (perhaps projecting a joyous reaction when all the retribution has been completed): “Rejoice, daughter of Zion, cry out oh Israel, be glad and celebrate with full hearts, daughter of

⁴⁵³ The verse bears striking resemblance to the warnings in Deut. 28:30 regarding if the people do not follow God’s ways, “If you build a house and not live in it, if you plant a vineyard, you will not harvest it.”

⁴⁵⁴ I.e. a particularly dark, foreboding cloud. Note, however, that the “clouds” referred to here are likely the swarms of locusts covering the sun.

⁴⁵⁵ I.e. sounding the alarm of distress in the most secure locations.

⁴⁵⁶ Recall the prophecies of Nahum, discussed above on page 149 and following.

Jerusalem. The LORD has removed your judgment⁴⁵⁷, swept away your enemies; the King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst, do not fear evil any longer.” “At that time, I will bring you, and in the day I gather you, I will make you renown and praised among all the nations of the world, when I return your captives before your eyes⁴⁵⁸ says the LORD.” (3:20)

j) *Haggai*

Note: As usual, this introduction is based on Encyclopedia Judaica “Haggai.” As no part of Haggai is used for a Haftorah, the JPS Haftorah Commentary does not have an introduction on this work.

Haggai’s prophecies date to 520 B.C.E., the second year of the reign of Darius I of Persia. The Persian empire had defeated Babylonia under Cyrus, and had ordered reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.⁴⁵⁹ The construction of this Temple was completed, according to Haggai, during the second year of Darius I’s reign. Although we have very little of Haggai’s prophecies (the book is 2 chapters and 38 verses), the book implies that he was well known and respected (1:12 refers to dignitaries listening to Haggai’s instructions) and his influence is also mentioned in the Book of Ezra.⁴⁶⁰

The prophecies of Haggai deal mainly with encouraging the construction of the Temple as well as messages of a positive future for the people. The Temple being built will renew the covenantal relationship between God and the Israelites, as existed during the time of the Exodus,⁴⁶¹ and bring with it success and prosperity. Haggai’s predictions include all nations turning toward the Temple.⁴⁶²

A review of the content of Haggai:

- Chapter 1: Encouragement to build the Temple: The book is introduced by telling us that on the first day of the sixth month (Elul) of the second year of Darius’s reign, God’s word came to Haggai for Zerubavel ben Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Yehotzadak, the High Priest. God says that the people believe it is not yet time to build the Temple. God asks whether it is time for them to dwell in their houses, while “this House” is in ruins. The people work hard, but have little success. God instructs the people to consider their lack of success. If they build the Temple, God will be pleased. For now, they see little success “because of my House, which is destroyed, and you run

⁴⁵⁷ I.e. all the necessary punishment has happened, and everything will now be OK.

⁴⁵⁸ An alternative translation is “when I restore your fortune.”

⁴⁵⁹ See Encyclopedia Judaica “Cyrus.” Cyrus’ policy was one of benevolence to the conquered. He also Babylonian gods to their temple, and generally had a policy of exiles.

⁴⁶⁰ Ezra 5:1 refers to Haggai and Zechariah prophesying to the People of Jerusalem. Ezra 6:14 refers to Haggai and Zechariah (along with Cyrus) encouraging the people to complete the building of the Temple.

⁴⁶¹ See the discussion of the Book of Exodus, above at p. 45 and following.

⁴⁶² The idea of all nations worshipping God at the Temple in Jerusalem is prominent in a number of prophetic works. See the introductions to Isaiah, above p. 72, Micah, above p. 146, and Zechariah, below p. 157. See also Jeremiah Chapter 3, p. 88 footnote 201 and accompanying text.

each person to his house. Therefore, the skies have held back from you dew, and the earth has held back from you its crop.” (1:9-10)⁴⁶³ We are told that Zerubavel son of Shalti’El, Yehotzadak the High Priest, and the rest of the nation “hearkened to the words of the LORD their God and the words of Haggai the propheth as the LORD their god had sent them, and the nation feared before the LORD.” (1:12) Haggai tells them that God has said, “I am with you.” (1:13) We are told that God inspires Zerubavel son of Shalti’El, Yehotzadak the High Priest, and the rest of the nation to work on the Temple. The work starts on the 24th day of Elul.

- 2:1-9: Haggai’s prophecy on the 21st of the 7th month (Tishre). God tells Haggai to speak to Zerubavel son of Shalti’El, Yehotzadak the High Priest, and the rest of the nation. God says that anyone who saw the original Temple must see the new Temple “as nothing.” Everyone should be strong, because God is with them. “The things I covenanted with you upon your exodus from Egypt, and my spirit, stand among you – fear not!” (2:5) Shortly, God will shake heaven and earth, “and the most prescious (possessions) of all the nations will come, and I will fill this Temple with glory, says the LORD of Hosts.” (2:7) The new Temple will be even more glorified than the first, God will give the place *shalom*.⁴⁶⁴
- 2:10-19: Haggai’s prophecy on the 24th day of the 9th month (Kislev). This is a further complaint regarding lack of progress on the Temple. God instructs Haggai to “ask *torah* (instruction, ruling) of the Priests.” If a person carries sanctified food in the fold of his/her garment, and that fold of the garment touches other food, is that other food sanctified?⁴⁶⁵ The priests respond in the negative. Haggai asks further whether those same foods would be defiled if they came in contact with someone who was impure due to touching a dead body. The priests respond that the foods would be defiled. God says that God has viewed the people in the same way – that any of their sacrifices are viewed as defiled. As long as the stone had not been laid for the Temple, there will still be a lack of prosperity. “Pay attention from this day onward, from from the 24th day of the ninth [month], from the day where the foundation was laid for the Temple, pay attention. Is the seed still in the granary? The vine, fig, pomegranate and olive tree have not yet born fruit, [however], from ths day I bless [you].” (2:18-19)⁴⁶⁶
- 2:20-23: Haggai’s prophecy for Zerubavel (a second prophecy on the 24th of Kislev). God tells Haggai to tell Zeruvavel that God will shake heavens and earth and overturn thrones, and “On that day, declares the LORD of Hosts, I will take you Zerubavel ben Shalti’el my

⁴⁶³ The association of success (particularly agricultural success) with beginning to build the Temple is found a lot in the post-exilic prophets. See also Haggai 2:18-19, p. 156 text accompanying footnote 466, Zechariah 8:10-13, p. 161 text accompanying footnote 489.

⁴⁶⁴ JPS translates “*shalom*” here as “prosperity,” i.e. indicating an expansive meaning for the word *shalom*.

⁴⁶⁵ Meaning, among other things, the food could only be eaten in a state of purity.

⁴⁶⁶ The association of success (particularly agricultural success) with beginning to build the Temple is found a lot in the post-exilic prophets. See also Haggai 1:1-10, p. 156 text accompanying footnote 463, and Zechariah 8:10-13, p. 161 text accompanying footnote 489.

servant, declares the LORD, and I will make you as a signet⁴⁶⁷, for I have chosen you, declares the LORD of Hosts."

k) Zechariah

Note: this introduction is based on Encyclopedia Judaica "Zechariah." And on the JPS Haftorah Commentary overview on Zechariah.

The introduction to the Book of Zechariah (Zachariah in English) introduces our prophet as Zecharia son of Berachia son of Iddo. If this is the same "Zechariah o fthe house of Iddo" mentioned in Nechemiah 12:16, then Zecharia is a priest. Three of Zechariah's propcehies are dated to the 2nd to 4th year of Darius' reign,⁴⁶⁸ which would be 520-518 B.C.E., making Zechariah a contemporary of Haggai. As with Haggai, there are a number of mentions of Zecharia in the books of Ezra and Nechemiah. Zechariah, like Haggai, encourages work on the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. Zecharia adds that exile was the result of sin, and that redemption is connected with repentance. Zechariah's prophecies are far more visual and symbolic than those of Haggai. Like most prophets, he respects and cares for Temple practice, but finds ethical practice to be of tantamount importance. Per Encyclopedia Judaica, Zecharia is unique in the importance he places on the role of the high priest.

Zechariah seems to break down into two sections. Chapters 1-8 are about the return from the Babylonian exile. The first six chapters relate directly to the returning exiles, while chapters 7 and 8 are more prophecies. Chapters 9-14 (often broken down further into chapters 9-11 and 12-14) speak destruction for Israel's neighbors and redemption of Israel (though, not without significant losses).⁴⁶⁹ No mention is made of a prophet's name or time period.

Much of Zecharia is apocalyptic, with powerful visions fo death and destruction followed by a time of good and peace.⁴⁷⁰

Spanning both the first and second parts of Zecharia is a vision of the future where all people worship God in Jerusalem.⁴⁷¹

A review of the content of Zechariah:

- 1:1-1:6: Opening oracle. The first prophecy in Zecharia is dated to the eighth month (Cheshvan) in the second year of Darius's reign.⁴⁷² "Say to them: 'Thus said the LORD of Hosts: 'Return to me, declares the LORD of Hosts, and I will return to you,' says the

⁴⁶⁷ I.e. Zerubavel will be associated with God. Scholars contrast this verse with Jeremiah 22:24 where God decries that Coniah, son of Yehoyachim is God's Signet – a matter that will be changed by his being delivered into Nevuchadnezar's hands.

⁴⁶⁸ See the introduction to Haggai, above p. 155.

⁴⁶⁹ This section is part of the genre of "The Day of the Lord." See above p. 75 footnote 170 and the crossreferenced in that footnote.

⁴⁷⁰ In this regard, see the discussion on "The Day of the Lord," etc., see above p. 75 footnote 170 and the crossreferenced in that footnote.

⁴⁷¹ The idea of all nations worshipping God at the Temple in Jerusalem is prominent in a number of prophetic works. See the introductions to Isaiah, above p. 72, Micah, above p. 146, and Haggai, above p. 155. See also Jeremiah Chapter 3, p. 88 footnote 201 and accompanying text.

⁴⁷² This would place this prophecy as a bit more than a month after work had started in earnest on the Second Temple, per Haggai 1:15.

LORD of Hosts.”” (1:3) The people should not repeat the mistakes of their ancestors, who failed to listen to the warnings of the prophets. Those ancestors later realized that God’s promises of doom caught up with them, “. . . As the LORD of Hosts planned to do to us in accordance with our ways and deeds, thus [God] has done with us.” (1:6)

- 1:7-6:15: Visions of Zechariah. These visions are reported by Zechariah in the first person – i.e “and I saw,” “and I lifted my eyes,” etc.

- 1:8-17: Vision of horses. Zechariah sees a man riding on a red horse among a number of horses. Zecharia asks the man what he is seeing, and is told that God has sent the horses to roam the earth. The horses report back to the man (now referred to as “a *malach* (angel or messenger) of God”) that they have found the land to be quit. The angel now cries out to God and asks when God for how long God will not have mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah which have been despised for seventy years.⁴⁷³ God responds to the Angel with “good words, words of consolation.” (1:13) The angel instructs Zechariah to tell the people that God has said that God has been very jealous⁴⁷⁴ (alt: very vengefully jealous) for Jerusalem and Zion.⁴⁷⁵ However, God will greatly punish the nations who were designed as a tool of God’s punishment, but overdid that. God will return to Jerusalem: “and the LORD shall once again comfort Zion, and will choose Jerusalem again.” (1:17)
- 2:1-4. Zechariah lifts his eyes and sees four horns,⁴⁷⁶ which the angel describes as “the horns that tossed (i.e. destroyed) Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.” Then four smiths come to hew the horns, symbolic of how God will exact revenge on the destroyers of Judah.
- 2:5-17: Vision of a Jerusalem without boundaries and oracles regarding a return from exile. Zechariah tells us that he lifted his eyes and saw a man with a measuring line. Zechariah asks the man where he is going, and he says he is going to measure the length and width of Jerusalem. Zechariah’s angelic accompaniment walks forward and is met by another angel, whom Zechariah’s angel tells to run after the man with the measuring line and say, “Jerusalem will sit unwalled due to the abundance of people and animals within her. And I will be for her,’ declares the LORD, ‘a firey wall surrounding, and I will be for glory within her midsts.’” (2:9).
- 2:10-17: Oracles of return from exile. These oracles are declared by Zechariah (or, perhaps, the angel).
 - 2:10-13 God bids everyone to return from their dispersion. All who harmed the people will be punished, and will be spoil for the people that they enslaved, “and you will know that the LORD of Hosts sent me.”

⁴⁷³ It seems to me this is a ballpark figure. The prophecy is dated to 520 B.C.E, 66 years after the destruction of the final fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple.

⁴⁷⁴ God’s having קָנְאַת הָגָן (great jealousy) for Jeruslaem is also expressed below at 8:2. See below p. 161 text accompanying footnote 487.

⁴⁷⁵ Though often “Zion” is used synonymously with “Jerusalem,” here it probably refers to the Temple Mount.

⁴⁷⁶ Per JPS Tanakh the four horns correspond ot the four winds of 2:10.

• 2:13-2:17⁴⁷⁷ “Shout out and be glad, daughter of Zion, for behold I come, and I will dwell among you,’ declares the LORD.” Many nations will converge on Jerusalem, “and you will know that the LORD of hosts sent me to you.” God will once again take Judah as God’s portion, and will once again choose Jerusalem.

- Chapter 3: Vision of the High Priest in the heavenly court. Zechariah tells us that God showed him “Joshua the High Priest,”⁴⁷⁸ standing before the angel of the LORD, with the *satan* (accuser) standing on Joshua’s right to accuse him (*lesitno*).⁴⁷⁹ God (or perhaps God’s angel) rebukes the *satan*, presumably for having accused Joshua, saying, “Is this not a fire-brand saved from the fire.”(3:2) We are told that Joshua was clothed in dirty clothing. God orders that this clothing be replaced, adding, “see that I have removed from you your guilt, and clothed you in robes.” (3:4) God’s angel tells Joshua that if he follows God’s law, Joshua will retain his post, and that Joshua will be free to move about the heavenly court. Joshua is told that he and his fellow priests are a sign that God, “will bring my servant the branch,” (3:8) a reference to the restoration of the Davidic dynasty.⁴⁸⁰ God refers to a stone that God has placed before Joshua that has seven eyes.⁴⁸¹ God will do what is engraved on that stone, and “erase the sins of the land on a single day.” (3:9) This will bring about a time of peace (3:10)
- Chapter 4: Vision about Zerubavel⁴⁸² (menorah vision). Zecharia has a vision of a lampstand (menorah) with a bowl above it. The bowl above it has 7 lamps, and there are olive trees to either side of the bowl. Zecharia does not understand the vision, and his angelic guide explains: “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubavel, saying, ‘not by might and not by power, but only by my spirit,’ says the LORD of Hosts.” (4:6) Obstacles shall be removed from Zecharia’s way. The menorah therefore symbolizes the completeness of God’s complete dominion, and that Zerubavel is to rely on God’s power for his success. Zerubavel founded the Temple, and will complete it. People will rejoice when “they see the distinguished stone” (I presume this is the stone mentioned in 3:9) in Zerubavel’s hands, for, “those seven are the eyes of the LORD that range over the whole earth. (4:10) Zecharia asks for

⁴⁷⁷ 2:14-4:7 is used as the Haftorah for the Shabbat of the Torah reading Beha’alotekha and for the Shabbat of Chanukah.

⁴⁷⁸ Recall that Joshua son of Yehotzadak was one of the subjects of Haggai’s prophecies.

⁴⁷⁹ The *satan* is an angel whose function was to act as accuser (i.e. a prosecuting attorney).

⁴⁸⁰ The JPS Haftorah commentary explains that this verse hints at a “future diarchy, the dual leadership of priest and king.” (see comment on Zechariah 3:8 both within their commentary on the Haftorah for Beha’alotekha as well as in their overview of the Book of Zechariah). Note that the next prophecy in Chapter 4 is principally about Zerubavel, the governor of Judah, but also makes reference to two “sons of oil” (4:14) i.e. the anointed priest and king. The idea of duarchy is more explicitly expressed in 6:13, see below p. 160 footnote 486 and accompanying text.

⁴⁸¹ It seems, based on 4:10 that these seven eyes are a reference to God’s watching over the entire world (the number 7 functioning as a symbol of completeness).

⁴⁸² Zerubavel was the governor of Judah. He was also one of the subjects of Haggai’s prophecies.

- the meaning of the two olive trees. They are explained as, “the two sons of oil (i.e. anointed ones) who stand by the LORD of the whole earth.” (4:14)⁴⁸³
- In 5:1-4 Zechariah sees a flying scroll. The scroll represents a curse upon those who steal and those who swear falsely in God’s name. They have thus far gone unpunished, but the scroll represents a curse being brought upon them.
 - In 5:5-11 Zechariah is shown a flying tub with a lead cover. As the cover is lifted, Zechariah sees a woman in the tub, which the angel says is “wickedness.” The angel pushes her down into the tub, and replaces the cover. Two winged women come and fly off with the tub. The angel explains that they are going to build her a shrine for the tub in Shinar (i.e. Babylonia per JPS Tanakh), thus purging Jewish land from evil.⁴⁸⁴
 - Chapter 6: A final vision and instructions for the prophet.
 - In 6:1-8 Zechariah sees four chariots coming out from between two copper mountains. He is told they symbolize the four winds that cover the earth and do God’s will.
 - In 6:9 and following, Zechariah is told to take/receive (gifts) from the communities in exile and use that material to create crowns. He is to place a crown on Joshua’s head and instruct Joshua that there is a man called “branch”⁴⁸⁵ who will build the Temple. He will reign upon his throne with the Priest in (or perhaps beside) his throne,” and a peaceful understanding shall be between the two of them.” (6:13)⁴⁸⁶ The crowns are to be housed in the Temple as memorials to the communities that provide the resources for them. The chapter ends with the exhortation, “it will be (i.e. if only) if you obey the words of the LORD your God.” (6:15)
 - Chapter 7: An inquiry about fasting. Chapter 7, dated to the fourth year of Darius (518 B.C.E.) tells of a question asked of the priests and prophets, as to whether fasts commemorating the destruction of the Temple should be maintained. The question is presumably motivated by the return of Jews to their homeland. The answer is somewhat ambiguous. God says that the fasts were not for God’s benefit. Rather, God demanded, “ . . . true justice shall you judge, and kindness and mercy practice, each toward his brother.” (7:8) But the people didn’t listen: “And they hardened their hearts from listening to the Torah and the words that the LORD of hosts sent through his spirit in the hands of the early prophets, and there was great anger from the LORD of hosts.” (8:12) This brought destruction. Though the implication is unclear, the JPS Haftorah Commentary in its overview to Zechariah suggests, “The implication seems to be that fasting is in order all the while that the immoral conditions remain that lead to the people’s ruin.” The topic of fasting will be brought up again on 8:18-19.
 - 8:1-19: A collection of divine declarations introduced by “Thus said the LORD of Hosts.”

⁴⁸³ A reference to Zerubavel, as political leader/king and Joshua the High Priest. See above footnote 480.

⁴⁸⁴ This understanding comes from the JPS Haftorah Commentary overview on Zechariah.

⁴⁸⁵ I.e. a branch of David’s line. Based on Chapter 4, one would surmise this to be a reference to Zerubavel.

⁴⁸⁶ For further symbolism regarding this peaceful partnership of king and priest, see chapters 3 and 4 above, and in particular footnote 480 and p. 159.

- 8:2-3: God has been exceedingly jealous for Zion.⁴⁸⁷ However, God says, “ I will return to Zion and dwell within Jerusalem, and Jerusalem will be called “City of Faithfulness,” and the mountain of the LORD of Hosts [will be called] the Holy Mountain.” (8:3).
- 8:4-5 is a vision of peace and tranquility, “Yet again elderly men and elderly women will dwell in the streets of Jerusalem . . . and the streets will be filled with boys and girls playing in her streets.”
- 8:6-8 Though the remnant of the Jews may think God’s salvation is impossible, God knows it to be possible. God will rescue God’s nation from east and west (i.e. wherever they are) and bring them to live in Jerusalem, “And they will be for me a nation, and I will be for them a God,⁴⁸⁸ in truth and righteousness.” (8:8).
- 8:9-13. God bids the people who hear the prophecies upon the laying of the foundation for the Temple to be confident. Previously, “man’s earnings were nothing,” (in context meaning there was no agricultural success” and God caused interpersonal friction. Now (i.e. now that the Temple is being built)⁴⁸⁹ God will treat the people differently, and “the vine will give her fruit , the land will give her grain, and the skies will give their dew . . .” (8:12) “And ti will be that just as you were a curse among the nations, House of Judah and House of Israel, so will I save you and make you a blessing⁴⁹⁰ – do not fear, strengthen your hand (i.e. take courage).” (8:13)
- 8:14-16 Just as God promised punishment in the past, God promises good on the people now. What is expected of the people is righteousness, “These are the things that you shall do – speak truthfully, a person with his fellow; truth and complete justice (*mishpat shalom*) shall you adjudicate in your gates.⁴⁹¹ And a person shall not plot evil against his fellow in his heart, and do not love a false oath – for all this is what I detest, declares the LORD.” (8:14-16)
- 8:17: God promises that the communal fast days will become days of celebration. The verse ends with the words “love truth and peace,” implying that such love is a prerequisite for changing these days of mourning into days of celebration.⁴⁹²

⁴⁸⁷ The reference to God’s קָנְזַת־קָנָה (great jealousy) reflects Zechariah’s words in 1:14, see above p. 474 text accompanying footnote 158.

⁴⁸⁸ This expression of the mutual covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people is expressed throughout the Bible. Other occurrences include Ex. 6:7, Lev. 26:12, Jer. 7:23, 11:4, 13:11, 24:7, 30:25, 32:28, Ezekiel 11:20, 14:11, 36:28, 37:23, 37:27, Hosea 1:9, Zach. 8:8. See above p. 97 footnote 233. **NOTE TO SELF – PARE DOWN THIS FOOTNOTE AFTER CLASS.**

⁴⁸⁹ The association of success (particularly agricultural success) with beginning to build the Temple is found a lot in the post-exilic prophets. See also Haggai 1:1-10, p. 156 text accompanying footnote 463, and 2:18-19, p. 156 text accompanying footnote 466.

⁴⁹⁰ A common statement of fortune (or misfortune) in the Bible is that a person will be so blessed (or cursed) that others will be blessed (or cursed) that they should have the same fate. See e.g. Genesis 12:2.

⁴⁹¹ During the Biblical period, the town gates were a place for administration of municipal matters and matters of justice.

⁴⁹² See chapter 7 discussed above.

- 8:20-23 includes a promise of Jerusalem becoming a religious center for all people.
“And many nations and multitudes of peoples will come to seek out the LORD of Hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat before the LORD. Thus says the LORD of Hosts: ‘In those days ten men from nations of all languages will grab and take hold of the corner (of the clothing) of each Jew saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.’” (8:22-23)
- Chapter 9 contains prophecies of Divine hegemony and the defeat of many nations. God’s dominion will spread far and wide. Tyre and Sidon, as wealthy as they are will be defeated, as will Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, Philistia etc (at the hands of who? When?). The remnants of these nations will become members/subjects of Israel: “. . . Even his (Philistia’s) remainders will become God’s, and he will be as a clan in Judah, and Ekron like the Jebusites.” (7:8)⁴⁹³ Verse 9 bids, “Rejoice much, daughter of Zion, sing daughter of Jerusalem, behold your king will come to you, victorious (alt: righteous) and triumphant is he, humble (lit. poor) and riding on a donkey and on an ass son of a she-ass.” This king remove chariots from Efraim (i.e. invading powers from the area of the Northern kingdom)⁴⁹⁴ and negotiate peace/surrender with other nations, thus establishing broad rule. The people will be mighty warriors with God protecting them.
- Chapter 10 is a fairly meandering prophecy about God bringing victory and prominence to a currently troubled people. It begins with a promise of God’s bringing rain in due time and then speaking of how the people got false information from sorcerors and the like “. . . therefore they were carried off like sheep, they suffered for lack of a shepherd.” (10:2) God is angry with the shepherds (i.e. the ones who let the people astray in verse 2) because God has remembered (i.e. taken concern for) God’s flock and will give them strength and victory. “And I will make the House of Judah victorious, and the house of Joseph I will save; I will restore them for I have forgiven them, and they will be as though I never spurned them; for I am the LORD your God and I will answer them.” (10:6) There is talk of ingathering, redemption, and growth in numbers. “And I will return them from the land of Egypt and from Assyria I will gather them, and to the land of Gilead and Lebanon I will bring them, and they will not find [enough room] for themselves.” (10:10) “And I will give them victory through the LORD, and in his (i.e. my) and they will walk (march?) in His (i.e. My) name’ – declares the LORD.” (10:12)
- Chapter 11 opens with an oracle of doom against foreign nations. Then, the prophet tells a story which is symbolic of a people who have been led astray and will be given to a ruthless conqueror. God tells the prophet to tend sheep that are intended for slaughter, whose buyers will slaughter them without conscience. The prophet takes charge of the sheep, and makes use of two staffs, one on which the word “pleasantness” (symbolic of divine favor) and one with the word “unity” (probably a reference to unity between the Northern and Southern kingdoms of Israel). The prophet does not shepherd well

⁴⁹³ The Jebusites were the people of Jerusalem, defeated by King David. As Encyclopedia Judaica (“Jebusite”) puts it “Clearly all Jebusite inhabitants were not destroyed because David bought a threshing floor from Araunah the Jebusite in order to build an altar (II Sam. 24: 18–24), and also because David may have integrated Jebusite craftsmen and officials into his service.”

⁴⁹⁴ This chapter and the following chapters seem to have a number of references to the Northern and Southern kingdom of Israel, which we have discussed a lot in other prophets. On the split of the Northern and Southern Kingdom see 1 Kings 12:1-24, discussed above p. 61.

(symbolic of the bad leadership the people have had). During the course of the chapter, the prophet breaks both staffs. God's words toward the end of the chapter seem to explain the meaning of all this, "For behold I will establish a shepperd in the land who will not look for the lost or seek the strayed, nor heal the injured or nor sustain the frail, but will just eat the flesh of the healthy and tear off their hooves." (12:16)

- Chapter 12 opens with a declaration by God, "Who stretches out the skies and gives Earth its foundation , who puts the spirit of man within him." Jerusalem will be made a certal place in a cosmic battle. It will be besieged. God will strike panic in the horses and madness over the riders of those besieging Jerusalem. God will give Judah (i.e. the Southern kindom, with Jerusalem as its capital) a great victory. God will want to destroy all of the nations that are besieging Jerusalem, but, enigmatically, will "pour out upon the House of David and on all inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of pity and compassion, and they will look at all of the slain and wail over them as the lament over an only [child] and will be embittered as one who is embittered for [the loss of] a firstborn [child]." All of the people of Judah will separate themselves, clan by clan and separating men and women, in order to wail over the annihilation of the besieging nations (or possibly to pray to avoid that outcome).
- Chapter 13 is a heavy dose of apocalyptic literature.⁴⁹⁵ The theme is a purgation of sin. The chapter begins by saying that "on that day," there will be a fountain to purge and cleanse people from sin. God will remove all the idols, and cause an end to prophecy.⁴⁹⁶ God summons a sword to come up and strike down the shepperd of the people (i.e. the bad leaders). Two thirds of the population will be wiped out. "And I will bring the [remaining] third through fire (i.e. for purification) and will smelt them as one smelts silver . . . he (i.e. they) will call out in my name, and I will answer him; I will say 'he is my people' and he will say, 'the LORD is my God.'"⁴⁹⁷
- Chapter 14, read as the Haftorah for the first day of Sukkot, is another apocalyptic chapter. It tells of a future where Jerusalem will be besieged, attacked, and plundered. Half of the people will be exiled, half not. Then God will fight the besieging nations. God will open up the Mount of Olives. As this happens, there will be no sunlight or moonlight, but instead there will be constant light. Jerusalem will be blessed with water at all seasons. "And the LORD will be King upon all the earth; on that day the LORD will be one, and His name one." (14:9)⁴⁹⁸ People will dwell securely, with destruction never again coming to Jerusalem. The prophet describes the plague with which God will strike those who attack Jerusalem.Those who survive among the nations who besiege Jerusalem will come to Jerusalem each year at Sukkot "to bow before the King, the LORD of Hosts." (14:16)

⁴⁹⁵ In this regard, see the discussion on "The Day of the Lord," etc., see above p. 75 footnote 170 and the crossreferenced in that footnote.

⁴⁹⁶ All prophecy or just false prophecy?

⁴⁹⁷ This strikes me as the reverse of the formula "And they will be for me a nation, and I will be for them a God" that appeared in 8:8 and appears in so many Biblical texts. See above p. 97 footnote 233.

⁴⁹⁸ This verse is used as the last sentence of *Alenu* (*Alenu* is discussed above at p. 38).

1) *Malachi*

Note: this introduction is based on *Encyclopedia Judaica* “*Malachi*.” And on the *JPS Haftorah Commentary* overview on *Malachi*.

The final book anthologized among the 12 “Minor Prophets” is Malachi. The name means, “My messenger,” or perhaps is a shortening of *Malachiah*, “Messenger of God.” Generally, it is surmised that this is more a title than a name, and that the identity of the prophet in this work is left unstated. This is further supported by 3:1: “Behold I send *malachi* (my messenger).” Rabbinic tradition, found for example in the Aramaic translation (Targum) of Malachi associates these prophecies with the scribe Ezra. Others find it hard to believe that Ezra’s involvement in such prophecies would not be mentioned explicitly, if it were the case.

Dating the book of Malachi is difficult, and opinions vary greatly. It is clear that it is written in postexilic times (i.e. during the return to Israel after the Babylonian exile). It seems that the Temple is now relatively fully functioning, putting us at some time after Haggai and Zachariah. A variety of technical issues point to a date before Ezra and Nechemiah. Malachi 1:3-4 refers to the destruction of Edom, which was probably completed by the end of the sixth century, so a date of approximately 500 B.C.E. seems most likely.

Malachi has six sections, each beginning with a statement from God or the prophet, which is challenged by the people or priests, and then defended by God. The people are roundly criticized for immoral and impious behavior, including cultic violations intermarriage, and failure to submit tithes.

Malachi is a highly stylized work, featuring the recurrence of a number of words and rhetorical patterns. Puns are used extensively.

A review of the content of Malachi:

- 1:1-5: God’s love for Israel. God says that God loved them. The people ask how God has done so. God explains that God chose Jacob over Esau. Essqu’s hills are now desolate. Though there are thoughts of rebuilding Edom (another name of Esau), “thus says the LORD of Hosts: ‘they will build, and I will destroy.’”
- 1:6-14: The people have desecrated God’s name. God says that although a son honors the father, and a slave His master, the people, and in particular the Priests, have desecrated God’s name. The people ask how they have done so. God says they have placed defiled food on God’s alter. The people again ask how, and God responds, “by saying ‘the Table of God is defiled.’” (1:7) God rhetorically asks whether it is not wrong for the people to offer injured animals as sacrifices. God is sick of these unworthy sacrifices: “If only you would lock the doors and not light my altar needlessly; I have no desire for you, says the LORD of Hosts, and your offerings I will not accept from your hands.” (1:10) God is lauded and worshipped by people across the earth, but the people (of Jerusalem) desecrate God’s name by saying “by saying ‘the Table of God is defiled . . .’” (1:12)
- 2:1-9: Condemnation of the priests. God assails the priests for their failings, and promises to curse them, and curse those whom they bless. God explains that God created a covenant with Levi,⁴⁹⁹ whose deeds were supposed to be followed by his progeny: “Torah

⁴⁹⁹ Levi is one of Isaac’s 12 sons. Aaron, a Levite became the first Kohen (priest), and his progeny served as priests. The rest of the Levitical tribe served as helpers in the Temple.

(i.e. rulings) of truth were in his mouth, and perverseness was not on his tongue. With *shalom* and uprightness he walked with me, and he kept many from sin. For the lips of a priest guard knowledge, and Torah (i.e. teachings, rulings) are asked from his mouth, for he is a messenger (*malach*) of the LORD of Hosts. But you have strayed from the path, caused many to stumble in Torah, have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of Hosts.” (2:6-8)

- 2:10-12: Condemnation of intermarriage. “Do we not have one father? Did not one God create us? Why does each person break with his brother to break the covenant of our father?” (2:10) Judah has profaned the holy (Jerusalem/the Temple) by consorting with “the daughters of strange gods.”
- 2:13-16: Condemnation of divorce. The people complain that God does not respond to their sacrifices, asking why this happens. It is because God is judging them for their relationships “between you and the wife of your youth with whom you have broken covenant.” (2:14) It should be noted that this section likely does not condemn divorce entirely, but perhaps its frequency and uses.
- 2:17-3:5: God’s justice. The people have wearied God, and ask how they have done so. “By your saying ‘all who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORd, and they are whom God chooses,’ or “Where is the God of Justice.”” God will send God’s angel (*malachi*) who will clear a path for God. The people are asked rhetorically who will be able to endure the day of God’s coming. God will be like fire refining metals, refining the Levites so that they bring proper offerings in the Temple. “And the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD, as in the days of old, and in former years.” (3:4) But God will also be judge and swift accuser, “upon the sorcerers, adulterers, those who swear falsely or cheat the wage laborers, widows and orphans, and subvert the widow, and do not have awe of me⁵⁰⁰, says the LORD of hosts.”
- 3:6-12: A bid for repentance, particularly regarding tithes. God has not changed, and the children of Jacob have not been destroyed. However, from the days of their ancestors they have strayed from God’s ways. “ . . . ‘Return to me, and I will return to you,’ says the LORD of Hosts, but you say, ‘how can we return.’” (3:7) God asks rhetorically if people can cheat God, because the people have attempted to do so. They ask how they have done so, and God says they have done so through the laws of tithing. The people are under a curse (=famine/drought) but cheat God out of tithes. “Bring all your tithes to the storehouse, and let there be provisions in my Temple, and test me in this regard, says the LORD of hosts, if I do not open for you the floodgates of the heavens and pour out unlimited blessing for you.” (3:10)
- 3:13-21: A promise of future justice (this section is similar to 2:17-3:5). God complains that the people have spoken against Him, and the people ask how they have done so. God says they have said that there is no benefit to following God’s laws, and that those who do wrong prosper. God has noted that the those who have awe of God have said this, but God will “be as tender to them as a man is tender to his son who tends to him.” (3:17) “Then you will see [the difference] between the righteous and the evil, between one who serves God and the one who does not serve him.” (3:18) God will treat the evildoers as

⁵⁰⁰ “Who do not have awe of me,” is to be taken not as a separate violation in this list, but as the common thread that leads to these violations.

fire to straw. “And a sun of victory will shine for you, with healing in its wings, you will go forth and stamp like calves of the stall.” (3:20)

- 3:22-24: Encouragement and promises for the future: “Remember the Torah of my servant Moses, which I commanded him at Horeb⁵⁰¹ upon all of Israel, laws and rules. Behold, I send to you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome Day of the Lord. And he will return the hearts of parents upon their children, and hearts of children upon their parents, lest I come and strike the whole earth with destruction.” (3:23-24) Note the reference to, arguably, the two greatest prophets of Israel, as the closing words of the Book of Prophets. This seems a reminder of the primacy of Mosaic law, and a promise of future divine guidance.

KETUVIM – THE WRITINGS

1) Psalms (Tehilim)

The background information on Psalms is based on *Encyclopedia Judaica*, “Psalms.”

The Book of Psalms is known in Hebrew as *Tehilim* (~songs of praise).⁵⁰² It contains a collection of a number of different types of prayers, many if not all of which were designed for music. Many psalms have been incorporated into the Jewish prayer services. The 150 Psalms have been broken down into five books, with some overlap between the books. Each book is marked off by a concluding doxology (a formulaic praise of God).⁵⁰³ Though the Psalms themselves may be earlier, these verses concluding each book are clearly post-Exilic (i.e. post 586 B.C.E.). For a variety of reasons, EJ indicates that likely Books 1, 2, 3 and 4-5 constitute four distinct books that were combined later, and that the separation of Books 4 and 5 was artificial, perhaps added to match the 5 books of Moses with 5 books of Psalms. Many smaller subdivisions within the Psalms can also be identified.

For a variety of reasons, modern scholars have rejected the 19th-century scholarship that argued that the Psalms were compiled during the Hellenistic period, and favor a much earlier dating. The reasons for this conclusion include the nature of the language and theology, as well as the fact that most historical references are to the period of the judges (notable exceptions is Psalm 137 (and probably 126) which refer to the Babylonian exile).

Traditionally, Psalms is viewed as being written by King David. The book itself does not make this claim of authorship. Close to half of the psalms are designated as being “*le-David*,” which could mean “by David,” but could also be an indication that the particular text was

⁵⁰¹ Another name for Mount Sinai.

⁵⁰² Note that there is some interesting discussion regarding why Psalms is known as *Tehillim* and not *Tehillot*, as would be expected when pluralizing a feminine word such as *tehillah*. EJ writes: “It must be supposed that the masculine plural form represents an internal, post-biblical Hebrew development parallel to the development of *tefillim/n* as the plural of *tefillah* in the sense of “phylactery.” In any case, medieval Hebrew writers such as Mishael b. Uzziel (*Kitab al-Khilaf*) and Abraham ibn Ezra (*Iggeret ha-Shabbat*, 3) refer to the book as *Sefer Tehillot*, though whether they do so by some tradition or out of a desire to preserve the biblical Hebrew form, it is difficult to tell.”

⁵⁰³ EJ presumes that Psalm 150 functions as the conclusion of Book 5.

connected to a moment in David's life, reflects a style credited to David, or was commissioned by David. None of these possibilities take away from the distinct possibility of Davidic authorship, and some psalms quite clearly refer to David's involvement, such as Psalm 18 "[David] addressed the words of this song on the day that the LORD saved him from the hands of his enemies and from the hands of Saul." (18:1) EJ notes that the Biblical accounts of David definitely demonstrate his musical accomplishments, supporting the idea of his involvement with the psalms.

There are quite a few different "types" of psalms in the Book of Psalms, and categorizing them can be quite subjective. Certain psalms may fit into more than one type. However, here are some general typologies:

- Hymns: Poems of praise celebrating God's majesty, greatness and providence.
- Laments: These may be national or personal in scope (personal are more common).

Laments often include strong pleads for divine help. Personal laments refer to personal suffering, and often come with a person's claim of innocence. Laments often express the psalmist's absolute confidence that His prayer will be heard.

- Thanksgiving psalms: Again, may be either personal or national (or both), with personal prayers being more common. Many psalms of thanksgiving also speak of the previous circumstances from which the speaker is thankful for having been saved. These psalms intertwine with laments.
- Royal psalms: These psalms give attention to the anointed King, speaking of such subjects as his ideal qualities and problems he experiences.
- Psalms relating to the wisdom tradition⁵⁰⁴: Particularly pedagogic psalms, often reflecting on the type of behavior that finds favor with God, or the lessons to be learned from history.

It would be foolish to think about the Book of Psalms, without discussing the role of prayer/liturgy in Israelite religion. EJ notes a significant difference between Judaism and pagan cults. In pagan cults, religious acts "consisted of an inextricable combination of prayer and ritual." Strikingly, the Torah's prescriptions of cult ritual is not accompanied by any mention of prayers or incantations to be recited. Similarly, the psalms make no reference to any cultic ceremony that they were meant to accompany. This suggests that among Israelites, cult and prayer developed independently. However, there is also evidence of fairly ancient origins of liturgy in Israelite worship, including the Priestly blessing prescribed in Numbers 6:22-26 and the first fruit confession at Deuteronomy 26:1-11. We also have a number of instances of prayer in the Temple, such as Hannah's prayer in the sanctuary in Shiloh (1 Samuel 1:10-13).⁵⁰⁵ Based on this information, as well as extrapolating from other Near Eastern religions, we can presume that there were organized guilds of singers and musicians who operated in the Temple, as indicated by Chronicles mention of David's establishing such functionaries." EJ concludes: "There can be no doubt of the involvement of musical guilds in the public worship of Israel in the days of the kings."

Being a liturgical/musical text, Psalms is replete with a number of technical terms and notations, particularly at the beginning of the psalm. Some common headings are:

- Headings relating to persons. These headings include the letter *lamed*, and then the person. Generally, the *lamed* (ל) is an indicator of authorship or a guild associated with that text,

⁵⁰⁴ For more about the wisdom tradition, see the introduction to Proverbs, p. 170.

⁵⁰⁵ See above p. 51.

though it may indicate what or to whom the psalm is about/dedicated to (e.g. Psalm 72) or what person is meant to recite the psalm (e.g. Psalm 102).

- Headings with liturgical instructions. For instance, Psalm 30 opens, “*Mizmor* (song/psalm), a song for dedication of the Temple, *l'David*⁵⁰⁶.” Psalm 92 opens, “*Mizmor*, a song for the Sabbath day.” Psalm 100 opens, “*Mizmor l'Todah*,” perhaps indicating its use along with the thanksgiving sacrifice (*Todah*) or otherwise as a general thanksgiving prayer.
- Technical terms within headings. Often these terms are quite obscure. Examples:
 - *Mizmor*. This term occurs only in the Book of Psalms, and always as part of a title of a psalm. The term is almost always used in connection with a *lamed* and a proper name (i.e. *Mizmor l'David*). Generally, the word is translated “psalm,” hence the name of the book. The word “psalm” comes from the Greek, but is of equally ambiguous meaning. This word clearly refers to liturgical music, as indicated by its association with the word *shir* (song, as in *mizmor shir*) and to musical instruments (e.g. Psalms 33:2 “with ten-stringed harp *zameru* to Him.”)
 - *La'mentazeach* (=to/for *mentazeach*). The meaning of this word is unclear. Most take it as a reference to the choir-leader/director, while others associate it with the Hebrew word for victory (*nitzachon*) (making this a victory prayer) or with the Hebrew word for eternity (*netzach*). Others take the word to mean “to praise.”
 - *Shir*. Seems to be a general term for songs, which could refer to a secular or a religious song, unlike the term *mizmor*, discussed above.⁵⁰⁷ In Psalms, the word *shir* is always used before or after the word *mizmor*.
 - *Shir ha-Ma'a lot*. The root of this term seems to be the word “*ma'alah*,” which means step/gradation. Thus, this may be a reference to a particular musical style of gradation (e.g. crescendo). Others imagine the term to be connected to pilgrimage or the return of exiles (hence the common translation “A Song of Ascents”). The Mishnah⁵⁰⁸ associates the 15 psalms introduced as *Shir ha-Ma'a lot* with the 15 steps between the court of the Israelites and the court of women in the Second Temple, where the levitical musicians would stand during *simchat bet hasho'evah*.⁵⁰⁹ This would make these psalms “Songs for the steps.”

Other introductory technical terms include *maskil*. (meaning unknown, but likely indicating some type of song or musical skill required), *neginot* (probably referring to a stringed instrument), *tefillah* (prayer), *halleluy-ah* (an invocation: “praise God!”), and *tehillah* (praise - the word giving the book its Hebrew title, but ironically only is used in a heading in Psalm 145).

Within a psalm, there are two significant technical terms that come up. One is *selah*, which almost always occurs at the end of a verse or a psalm (rarely in the middle, and never at

⁵⁰⁶ See above re: the *lamed* prefix.

⁵⁰⁷ Note the instruction “*shiru*” (sing!) invariably bids people to sing liturgically.

⁵⁰⁸ See above, p. 10, footnote 4. Mishnah: A compilation of rabbinic statements about Jewish law compiled in the late 2nd century by Rabbi Judah the Prince. Theories vary as to the purpose of the work - it is either a law code, a school book, or a bit of both. Together with the Gemara, which is a commentary on the Mishnah, it makes up the Talmud. These are main sources of Jewish law. **PERSONAL NOTE: CUT DOWN THIS FOOTNOTE FOR WEB VERSION.**

⁵⁰⁹ A fertility ritual involving drawing of water.

the beginning). The meaning and etymology of *selah* is unknown, though it is presumed to be a musical instruction. Others suggest a meaning such as “always” or “for eternity.” Ibn Ezra suggests that *selah* is a liturgical response, whereby the worshiper affirms the truth of the sentiment indicated in the psalm.⁵¹⁰ Another common term within the psalms is *higayon*, which is likely a musical invitation instructing musicians to make a particular sound.

In studying the Book of Psalms, we will take some examples of the several different types of Psalms we identified above. Footnotes indicate psalms used as part of regular prayer services. *Note to the online reader: many translations of these texts can be found online. You can find Hebrew and English of these texts (with the 1917 JPS translation) at <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/> (click where it says “parallel Hebrew and English.”)*

- Hymns:
 - Psalm 92.⁵¹¹ Note the technical opening *Mizmor Shir L'Yom Hashabbat*.
 - Psalms 113 & 114.⁵¹²
- Laments (while reading these psalms, note the sense of the psalmist’s confidence that His prayer will be heard, which we discussed is often a feature of laments).
 - National Laments.
 - Psalm 79
 - Psalm 125
 - Personal Laments.
 - Psalm 3⁵¹³
 - Psalm 6. *Note that this psalm also has thanksgiving elements.*
 - Psalm 23.⁵¹⁴
 - Psalm 27⁵¹⁵
 - Psalm 51.⁵¹⁶
 - Psalm 130⁵¹⁷ *Note that this psalm also has thanksgiving elements.*
- Thanksgiving psalms
 - National Thanksgiving
 - Psalm 118⁵¹⁸
 - Psalm 136⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁰ Much like we use the word “amen,” see p. 23 above on “The Power of Amen.”

⁵¹¹ This psalm is recited as part of *Pesukei d’Zimrah* (see above p.33) on the Sabbath and holidays, and is also the Psalm of the day for the Sabbath (see “The Continuation of the Sabbath/Holiday Morning Service” p. 38).

⁵¹² These Psalms are part of Hallel, see above p. 35.

⁵¹³ On David’s fleeing from Avshalom’s rebellion, see 2 Samuel 2, discussed above p. 56.

⁵¹⁴ This is the famed “The LORD is my Shepherd” Psalm, often recited at funerals, unveilings, as part of Yizkor services, etc.

⁵¹⁵ This psalm is added as an additional psalm during the conclusion of morning and evening services during the High Holiday season (see “The Conclusion of Weekday Morning Services”, p. 37 though note that this psalm is recited on Shabbat and holidays during the season as well).

⁵¹⁶ On the story of David and Batsheva, see 2 Samuel 11-12, discussed above on page 55.

⁵¹⁷ This psalm is one of several psalms traditionally recited by or on behalf of one who is ill.

⁵¹⁸ These Psalms are part of Hallel, see above p. 35.

- Personal Thanksgiving (*note Psalms 6 & 130, discussed as laments, also fit the category of thanksgiving*).
 - Psalm 30⁵²⁰
 - Psalm 34⁵²¹
- Royal psalms
 - Psalm 45
 - Psalm 72
- Psalms relating to the wisdom tradition
 - Psalm 1
 - Psalm 15
 - Psalm 24⁵²²
 - Psalm 34 (also mentioned above as a Thanksgiving psalm).
 - Psalm 106
 - Psalm 112

2) Proverbs (Mishle)

The background information on Proverbs is based on *Encyclopedia Judaica*, “Proverbs.” Information regarding Wisdom literature is taken both from the entry on “Proverbs” as well as the entry on “Wisdom.”

Proverbs is one of three books in *Ketuvim* which belong to the genre of wisdom literature. It is the only one of the three that come from a positive perspective, as opposed to the books of Job and Ecclesiastes which come from the perspective of questioning wisdom.

“Wisdom literature” is a genre of literature with a certain cultural tradition and outlook on life (the “Wisdom Tradition”). It is prominent Psalms⁵²³, Lamentations⁵²⁴, Proverbs, and in the arguments of Job’s friends in the Book of Job.⁵²⁵ The wisdom tradition and wisdom literature celebrates many aspects of wisdom, including cunning, moral discernment, justice, knowledge, literary skills, etc. Wisdom is a taught and acquired skill. The wisdom tradition includes a very strong notion of reward and punishment, the importance of study of Torah, and trust in God.

Wisdom literature and traditions were not unique to the Israelites. Solomon’s wisdom is said to have surpassed the wisdom of Egypt (1 Kings 5:10), and there are a number of biblical references to the wisdom of Edom and Tyre (Jer. 49:7, Ovadiah 8, Ezekiel 28:2ff, 12ff). We also have certain wisdom texts from Egypt and Mesopotamia.

⁵¹⁹ This Psalm is included as part of *Pesukei d’Zimrah* (see above p.33) on the Sabbath and holidays, and also as part of the Hallel section of the Passover Seder.

⁵²⁰ Psalm 30 was added to the morning service in recent centuries.

⁵²¹ Psalm 34 is included as part of *Pesukei d’Zimrah* (see above p.33) on the Sabbath and holidays.

⁵²² Psalm 24 is recited when returning the Torah to the ark (other than on Shabbat).

⁵²³ Discussed beginning at p. 166.

⁵²⁴ See p. 179 footnote 546 and accompanying text.

⁵²⁵ See the discussion of Job beginning p. 175.

Wisdom literature has two main methods of training. *Musar* (“training”) and *Etzah* (“counsel”). Both seek to build the pupil’s moral character and train the pupil’s judgment. *Musar* comes from the parent or teacher acting as a parent. It features “do’s” and “don’ts” and longer discourses. *Musar* speaks in the imperative/command form and seeks to impose the parent/teacher’s will upon the student. *Etzah* is the counsel of the sage or teacher acting as a sage. It is generally expressed through single-sentences about how to live life well or badly. *Etzah* speaks in the indicative form (sometimes with rhetorical questions thrown in) and seeks a free and positive response from its recipient.

The book of Proverbs is a collection of wisdom that probably served as a manual for moral and religious instruction of the young by professional sages. The opening verses of Proverbs (1:2-6) express the goal of the work, which is intellectual and ethical training through understanding of proverbs, sayings, riddles, etc. The instruction in Proverbs range from the purely intellectual, to the secular, to those that associate wisdom and good conduct with religious faith. The basic theme is that which is stated at the end of the introduction in 1:7, “Awe of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”

The Book of Proverbs, as well as several subsections are introduced as “The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, King of Israel.” This does not necessarily denote that any particular part, or the entirety of the work is by Solomon (else, a single introduction at the beginning of the book would do). In fact, Chapters 30 and 31 are introduced as the words of others. There is some speculation that the reference to “Proverbs of Solomon” may designate a certain literary form of proverb that is used in the sections introduced as “Proverbs of Solomon,” particularly the style of single-line proverbs using parallelism.⁵²⁶

Dating the Book of Proverbs is particularly difficult, since minor expansions could have happened along the way, after the book really had already taken form. EJ’s conclusion is that, “Although the evidence is inconclusive, the late monarchical period seems as likely as any for the completion of the work in substantially its present form.”

A review of the content of Proverbs (outline based on Encyclopedia Judaica):

- Chapters 1-9 – Discourses and “wisdom poems.” 1:1-7 forms and introduction (described above), followed by ten distinct discourses with five poems mixed in. Each of the discourses exhorts the reader to learn wisdom, as it will guide a person’s living. Generally, the discourses are addressed to “*בְּנֵךְ*, my son/child”
 - In 1:10-19 the text speaks from parent to child, begging the child not to join evildoers, saying that in the end the evildoers only hurt themselves. “They lie in wait for their own blood, hide (to take) their own lives.” (1:18) 1:20-33 is a poem in which wisdom personified cries out publically about all those who refuse to accept her wisdom.⁵²⁷ They do so to their own detriment, and will not be able to call upon wisdom in their time of need. “For the tranquility of the fools will kill them, and the comfort of the dumb will cause them to be lost. But the one that listens to me will live securely, secure from the fear of evil.” (1:32-33)
 - In Chapter 2, the parental voice again exhorts the child to seek wisdom. If the child does so, “Then you will understand awe of the LORD and you will find knowledge of

⁵²⁶ The idea that the reference to Solomon may be a reference to a certain style is not unlike the discussion above concerning “Psalms of David,” in the introduction to Psalms, above, p.166.

⁵²⁷ Note that throughout Proverbs, wisdom is personified as a female.

God. For the LORD will give wisdom, from his mouth [emanates] knowledge and wisdom.” (2:6-7) Knowledge of God will teach knowledge of justice and protect a person from the ways of evildoers. The goal is for the person to go in just ways, “for the upright will inhabit the earth, and the pure will stay upon it (the earth). But the evildoers will be cut off from the earth, and the treacherous will be removed from it.” (2:21-22).

- Chapter 3 opens with another discourse encouraging the child to retain the wisdom that the parent imparts. “For length of days and years of life and peace will it add for you.” (3:2) The listener is asked to trust God, rather than the listener’s own wisdom. Poignantly, the listener is asked to accept God’s rebuke (i.e. punishment for any misdeeds) as a sign of love, “For the LORD rebukes those He loves, as a father (rebukes) his favored son.” (3:12). 3:13-20 is a poem about the rewards of wisdom. Some of the verses from this poem are particularly famous: “Fortunate is the man who finds wisdom . . . Length of days is in her right hand, in her left is riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who hold her, and those who uphold her are fortunate.”⁵²⁸ Verses 21-26 is a discourse on the safety and sense of security that come with being resourceful/cunning. 3:27-32 encourages the listener to do good when one is capable of doing so. “Say not to your fellow, ‘leave and return tomorrow and I will give,’ when you have it in your hand” – i.e. do not delay doing the good you are capable of doing. One should not harm a person with whom he has no rightful quarrel (v. 29-30) nor be jealous of an evildoer (v.31). The final verses of the chapter explain that such good behavior is wise because God supports those who do good, and punishes those who do evil.
- Chapter 4 contains three discourses on wisdom. In verses 1-9 the speaker asks the child to listen to the teachings, “for I give you good instructions, do not abandon *my torah* (i.e. my instructions).”⁵²⁹ (v2) The speaker relates how he, too, was once a young child, and his father encouraged him to seek wisdom. Verses 10-19 again instruct the child to seek wisdom. He should avoid evildoers, “For they cannot sleep if they haven’t acted evilly, and their sleep is stolen if they do not cause someone to stumble.” (v. 16) “The path of the righteous radiates like light . . . the path of evildoers is as darkness . . .” (v. 18-19) Verses 20-27 focus on the need to avoid evil. “Guard your heart more than anything you protect, for from it all life emanates.” (v. 23) “Do not sway right or left; turn your feet way from evil.” (v. 27)
- Chapter 5 bids the listener not to be seduced by a “strange” woman (A foreigner? An evil woman? A metaphor?), “whose lips drip with honey” but in the end will bring nothing but trouble. “Lest the strangers devour your strength and your toil be in the house of a foreigner.” (v. 10) In the end the person will cry out, “and you will say ‘how much I hated discipline, and my heart spurned rebuke. I didn’t listen to the

⁵²⁸ These last two sentences are recited during services when the Torah is put back in the ark. Note that in their original context, the verses speak of “wisdom,” and not the Torah *per se* (although, obviously, the Torah is a source of wisdom).

⁵²⁹ This verse is recited during the return of the Torah to the ark. In doing so, we take some poetic license by applying the term “תורתך” (*torati*) *my teachings* and applying it to The Torah, much like the verses mentioned above (see footnote 528 and accompanying text).

- voice of my teachers, and to my instructors I did not bend my ear. Quickly I was entirely troubled among the assembly and congregation.” (v. 12-14) “Let your fountain be blessed, and take joy in the wife of your youth.” (v. 18)
- Chapter 6: Verses 1-11 preaches against laziness and being dependent on others. “Go to the ant, lazy (person), see her ways and become wise. For she has no commander, officer, or ruler. She prepares her bread during the summer, gathers her food at harvest time.” (v. 6-8) Verses 12-15 speak of how an evildoer constantly looks to do evil, but will meet with calamity. In verses 16-19 we are told, “Six things, there are, that the LORD despises, and seven are the abomination of His soul. Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that spill innocent blood. A heart that devises evil thoughts, legs that are speedy to run to evil. A false witness speaking lies, and one who foists enmity upon brothers.” The chapter continues with exhorting the listener to keep his parents’ instructions, “For *mitzvah* (commandment) is a candle and *torah* (teaching) is light, and the path of life is rebuke that disciplines.” (v. 23) The discourse speaks of avoiding an evil woman – whose beauty might seduce the person, but to his own detriment. Verses 27-35 concentrate on the evil of adultery. “One who commits adultery is without heart, only one who would destroy his soul would do such a thing.” (v. 32)
 - Chapter 7 opens with a standard plea for the listener to heed the lesson. “Say to wisdom ‘you are my sister, and call understanding your relative. To keep you from a strange woman, from a foreign woman who speaks smoothly.’” (v. 4-5). The speaker describes a scene watched from the window, where a young man is met by a woman dressed as a harlot. She grabs him and kisses him. “Let us go and drink our fill of love till the morning, let us delight ourselves with loving. For the man is not in his home, he has gone far away.” (v. 18-19) The young man is described as being swayed by her, and is compared to an ox taken to the slaughter, “as a bird rushes into the trap, unaware that it is his life (that is at stake).” (v. 23) The chapter closes with further encouragement to avoid “her” enticements, “for her house is the path to *Sheol* (the netherworld), going down to the chambers of death.” (v. 27)
 - Chapter 8 is a poem, about wisdom personified calling out to people. Wisdom stands at a high point near the entrance to a city. The poem reports the words that she calls out, “I am calling to you, men, (and set) my voice to mankind.” (v. 4) Wisdom speaks about how her words are true and just, and how she abhors evil. She has wisdom and intelligence. “Through me kings reign, and rulers make just laws.” (v. 15) This chapter is most worthy of note for verses 22 through 30 in which wisdom says that she was created before God created the world and acted as a partner (how literally this is meant to be taken is subject to debate). “The LORD created me at the beginning of His path, first of his works of old. . . . Before he made earth and field or the first clumps of clay.” (v. 22, 26) “I was a craftsperson beside him, a source of happiness each day, rejoicing before him every day.” (v. 30) In the final verses of the chapter, wisdom returns to encouraging people to listen to her. “For those who find me find life, and obtains favor from the LORD. And the one who misses me destroys his soul; all who hate me love death.” (v. 35-36)
 - Chapter 9 pictures wisdom as having prepared a banquet and sending out invitations for people to come (i.e. to gain what wisdom has to offer). “Who is simple (let him) enter here,’ she says to the to the one lacking in judgment, ‘Come eat my bread and

drink my wine.”” (v. 5-6) Wisdom speaks about how it is unwise to rebuke a wicked person: “Do not rebuke a scoffer, lest he hate you, rebuke a wise person and he will love you. Give (instruction) to a wise person and he will become more wise, teach a righteous person and he will increase his learning.” (v. 8-9) The final part of chapter 9 is a bookend to the first section of proverbs, and returns to an idea expressed in 1:7. “The beginning of wisdom is awe of the LORD and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” (v. 10) “If you are wise, your wisdom is your own, if you are a scoffer, you will bear it alone.” (v. 11)

- Chapter 10-22:16: First collection of Solomonic Proverbs. This section consists of about 375 single-line proverbs and sayings, with no particular arrangement apparent (though some differences can be discerned between Chapters 10-15 and Chapter 16-22:16). Many of the proverbs contrast the fortunes of the evil and the righteous, or the fortunes of the wise and the wicked. *A good selection of proverbs, arranged by theme, can be found at <http://www.cb1.com/~john/Religion/proverbs.html> (not a Jewish website).* Note that almost all of the selections are from the Solomonic proverbs of 10-22:16 and Chapters 25-29 as these are the most pithy (i.e. 1-2 verse) statements more conducive to selection.
- 22:17-24:34: The “Thirty Precepts” of the Sages and related sayings. The “Thirty Precepts” section is clearly related to the Egyptian Instruction of Amen-em-ope. The section opens with the speaker asking for the listener’s attention, “Bend your ear and hear the words of sages, and pay attention to my wisdom. For it is pleasing if you keep them in your stomach, if they are all ready upon your lips.” (22:17-18) The reader is encouraged to take advantage of the poor: “Do not steal from the poor, for he is poor, nor crush the poor in the game, for the LORD will fight their battles and rob the soul of those that rob them.” (22:22-23) The listener is discouraged from seeking riches “You see it and it is gone, for it makes wings and flies like an eagle flies into the sky.” (23:5) Discipline (both for the individual and for their charges) is encouraged: “Bring your heart to discipline and your ear to wisdom. Do not withhold discipline from a child – when you hit him with a rod he will not die. You, hit him with a rod and you will save him from *sheol* (the netherworld.” The speaker says that s/he will be overjoyed if the listener gains wisdom. The listener is to avoid being jealous of evildoers, and instead have envy of those who have awe of God (23:17). The reader is warned to avoid the temptations of alcohol and strange women. It is important not to be jealous of, or associate with, evildoers. “Do not be jealous of evil men, and do not desire to be with them.” (24:1) One should not be troubled by evildoers, as they will meet their just dessert, but a person should not celebrate their downfall: “For seven times can a righteous person fall and get up, but evildoers are tripped up by misfortune (i.e. they cannot recover). When your enemy falls do not be joyful, and when he trips don’t let your heart rejoice. Lest the LORD see and it be bad in His eyes and He divert His wrath from upon him (the enemy).” (24:16-18) Turnabout is not fair play: “Do not be a witness against your fellow without reason and deceive with your lips. Do not say ‘as he did to me, so too I will do and give back to the person according to his deeds.” (24:28-29) The speaker describes seeing a vineyard of a lazy person, which is in terrible condition, and comes to the realization that laziness leads to poverty (30-34).

- Chapters 25-29: Second collection of Solomonic Proverbs, purportedly transmitted by Chizkiyahu's entourage.⁵³⁰ Per EJ, this set of proverbs is more secular and less moralizing than the set in 10-22:16. A few proverbs from 10-22:16 are repeated or have nearly identical counterparts in this section.
- Chapters 30-31: Appendixes. There are four appendixes, each different from the other (though the line of demarcation between two sections in Chapter 30 is less than clear).
 - Chapter 30 opens with the words of Agur Son of Jakeh of Massah⁵³¹, a person about whom we know nothing. Exactly how far into Chapter 30 his words extend is unclear. The speaker professes to be lacking in knowledge, and proclaims that "All the words of God are pure, He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him." (v. 5) Chapter thirty contains five different numbered sayings and riddles (e.g. "Three things amaze me, and four I cannot understand," v. 18 "There are four that are the smallest on the earth and are the wisest of the wise," v. 24).
 - 31:1-9 tell us, "The words of Lemuel, King of Massa, with which his mother chastised him," i.e. they are words spoken by Lemuel's mother. Lemuel's mother warns him "do not give your strength to women" (v.3) and "it is not for kings to drink wine" (v. 4) "Give drink to the one who is lost and wine to the bitter of spirit." (v. 6) She further exhorts him, "Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all those who are unfortunate. Open your mouth and judge righteously and do justice for the poor and needy." (31:8-9)
 - 30:10-31 is the famed "A Woman of Valor" poem, which is traditionally recited at Shabbat dinner. It is an acrostic poem, which as EJ puts it, "is remarkable for the light it throws on domestic activities in well-to-do homes and on the managerial responsibilities undertaken by the woman."

3) Job

NOTE: The background information on Ruth is based on Encyclopedia Judaica, "Job."

Job is one of three books in *Ketuvim* which belong to the genre of wisdom literature. Unlike the Book of Proverbs which we discussed above, this book comes from a perspective of questioning the wisdom tradition.⁵³² The basic story is of a righteous man, Job, whose righteousness and faith in God is tested by having him lose his family and fortune. Most of the book is spent with conversations between Job and his friends, where Job's friends try to convince him that his suffering is the result of Job's own failings.

Job begins with a two-chapter narrative which tells us of the misfortunes that beset Job, Job's refusal to denounce God, and the arrival of three friends to comfort Job. Following this introduction is some 39 chapters of disputations between Job and his friends (as well as, finally, a God's response), presented in poetic form. Finally, there is an 11 verse epilogue. During his discussions with his friends, many theological issues are addressed, most prominently the reason for suffering. Although Job refuses to denounce God, he also refuses to accept that his suffering is justified and challenges God to justify what has happened. Job's friends warn Job against his

⁵³⁰ On Chizkiyahu's reign, see above on II Kings 18 and following, beginning on page 69.

⁵³¹ Per E.J. ("Lemuel") Massa is a "North Arabian tribe, known from Genesis 25:14, one of the Kedemite peoples whose wisdom the Israelites held in high esteem."

⁵³² For more about the wisdom tradition, see the introduction to Proverbs, p. 170.

rejection of divine justice. In the end, God does speak with Job, but God's response seems to indicate simply that the nature of the world is beyond human comprehension.

The final version of Job likely dates to the third quarter of the sixth century BCE, based on the fact that a number of verses seem to reference verses from Isaiah 40 and following.⁵³³

. Ezekiel refers to Job in 14:14: "Were these three people in its midst, Noah, Daniel and Job; (only) they through their righteousness would their souls be saved . . ." (14:14)⁵³⁴ indicating that Job is a well known character in sixth century BCE (presuming this is the same Job). It is generally believed that there are two traditions about Job that came together, one of "Job the Patient" and one of "Job the Impatient," with the patient being the older tradition. Also, it is probably that some important elements to the story (for instance, the accusing angel's (Satan's) involvement) were added to a pre-existing story.

The ultimate message of Job is far from clear (EJ gives many different interpretations). Job and his friends vigorously debate God's justice, but God hardly speaks to the issue of justice when telling Job that the nature of God's world is beyond human comprehension. In the end, the book does a far better job of posing the question of human suffering and apparent injustice in the world than it does answering those same questions. EJ concludes as follows:

This summary of diverse current interpretations underlines the problematic character of the book no less than its endless fascination for those who ponder the "impossible problem of reconciling infinite benevolence and justice with infinite power in the creator of such a world as this" (J. S. Mill). In the words of the sages (Avot 4:15), "It is beyond our power to understand why the wicked are at ease, or why the righteous suffer."

A review of the content of Job (outline based on Encyclopedia Judaica):

- Chapters 1-2: Narrative introduction. The book opens by telling us of a man named Job from Uz, a man "pure and upright, who had awe of God and avoided evil." (1:1) He had seven sons and three daughters and a great many livestock.

5) Ruth

NOTE: We covered the Book of Ruth out of order in our class as we got to Shavuot. The background information on Ruth is based on Encyclopedia Judaica, "Ruth."

The Book of Ruth tells the story of a Jewish family from Beth Lechem in Judah, who migrate to the fields of Moav during a famine. During that time, all but the mother (Naomi) pass away, and the mother is left with the two Moabite women who married her sons. As Naomi returns to Israel, she is joined by one of her daughters-in-law, Ruth who eventually finds Boaz, a relative of her late husband, who marries her, in fulfillment of the laws of leverite marriage.⁵³⁵

⁵³³ On Isaiah 40-66, see above, p. 78.

⁵³⁴ The reference here is to three legendary figures of righteousness. The reference is not to the prophet Daniel, but to a different mythic figure of righteousness, known also in Phoenician legend. See Encyclopedia Judaica "Daniel."

⁵³⁵ Leverite marriage (*yibum* in Hebrew) is a rite whereby a close relative (usually the brother) of a man who dies without children is supposed to marry the man's wife, so that she may have

The final part of Ruth gives us a genealogy of Peretz (son of Jacob's son Judah) which tells us that Boaz and Ruth's child is the grandfather of King David. According to many, the main purpose of the Book of Ruth is to give information about David's ancestry. There is an ironic twist in this history of David's genealogy. Here, we have the noble story of the levirate marriage between Ruth and Boaz. Peretz, however, is the result of a less-than-noble story regarding the story of Tamar and Judah and his children.⁵³⁶ There are other interesting interplays between the Ruth and Tamar story. Both women are foreigners. The Bible seems clearly pejorative when it refers to Judah's going outside of the fold for wives for himself and his children (see the beginning of Gen. 38). Similarly, relations with Moabites was clearly frowned upon when Naomi's family flees to Moav during the famine.⁵³⁷ The Book of Ruth is clearly aware of this comparison, as the townspeople bless Boaz in 4:12 saying, "May your house be like the house of Peretz, whom Tamar bore to Judah . . ."

Like many biblical stories, God works behind the scenes, and is borne out through history. There is no overt divine act, things appear to happen at random, and yet everything seems guided to come to a good conclusion, and ultimately to the birth of the greatest monarch in Jewish history. Within the story, Naomi is sensitive to God's hand. When Naomi learns of Boaz's kindness toward Ruth, she exclaims, "Blessed is he of the LORD who has not abandoned his righteousness with the living and the dead . . ." (2:20), words strikingly reminiscent of the blessing recited by Abraham's servant when he happens upon Rebecca, a relative of Abraham's, when looking for a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:27).

The Book of Ruth gives us a good indication that it was written during the period of the monarchy. It mentions the birth of David. It also opens by telling us that this is a story that occurred, "in the days of the rule of the judges," indicating that the narrator sees this form of government as being in the past, and that monarchs were now in charge.

One interesting feature of the Book of Ruth is the use of symbolic names (a technique called *nomen omen*). The significance of these names are driven home by Naomi's request in 1:20 to no longer be called by her name. The meaning of each person's name will be noted as in the summary below.

Traditionally, the book of Ruth is read on Shavuot. This is because Ruth and Naomi return to Beth Lechem during the barley harvest, which is around Shavuot.

children, and the children will, at least in some respects, count as the children of the deceased man (Deut. 25:5-6). This law was designed to protect the widow, and make sure that she had someone to be responsible for her needs. If a man elects not to perform the levirate marriage, a ceremony called *chalitzah* ("the removal of the shoe") is performed, as prescribed in Deut. 25:7-10. We also see this ceremony performed in the Book of Ruth.

⁵³⁶ See Genesis 38. Judah's oldest son, Er, dies leaving a childless widow, Tamar. Judah marries Tamar to his next son, Onan, who, knowing that any child born to Tamar would not count as "his" child, would commit an act of what is now known as Onanism whenever he was with Tamar. Onan dies for this sin, and Judah fails to have his youngest son Shelah marry Tamar, for fear that Shelah, too, would die. Eventually, Tamar disguises herself as a prostitute, and gets herself solicited by Judah, so she can become pregnant (note that there are indications that in other Ancient Near Eastern cultures, at least, the father had levirate responsibilities (EJ "Levirite"). Peretz is the second of twins born through that act.

⁵³⁷ See further Deut 23:4-6 and E.J. "Moab."

A review of the content of Ruth:

- Chapter 1: Flight to Moav and return. Ruth opens setting a storytelling tone: “It was in the days that the judges ruled, and there was a famine in the land, and a man from Beth Lechem⁵³⁸ in Judah went to live in the fields of Moav, he and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech⁵³⁹, and the name of his wife Naomi (pleasantness), and the name of his two sons were Machlon and Chilion⁵⁴⁰, Empratites of Beth Lechem in Judah, and they came to the country of Moab and were there.” Elimelech dies. Then Machlon and Chilion get married to Ruth (friend, companion) and Orpah⁵⁴¹. Machlon and Chilion die, leaving Ruth with her daughters-in-law. Naomi decides to return to Beth Lechem because she has heard that “the LORD remembered His people” – i.e. that the famine had ended. Her daughters-in-law start to go with her, but she encourages them to stay in Moav, and prays that, “the LORD do kindness to you, as you have with those who passed away, and with me.”(1:8). She explains that she has nothing to offer them. She is too old to have children to do a levirate marriage with them, and even if she gave birth, they would have to wait quite a few years. Orpah returns to her home, but Ruth is steadfast. Naomi once again tells her to return, saying that Orpah made the right choice to “to her nation and to her god.” (1:15) Naomi steadfastly utters her declaration of dedication to Ruth: “Do not beseech me to abandon you and to turn away from you, for wherever you go I will go; and wherever you lie, I will lie; your nation is my nation and your G-d is my G-d. Wherever you die I will die; and there I will be buried; may G-d do this for me and more, for death will separate me from you.” (1:16-17)⁵⁴² When Naomi and Ruth come into Beth Lechem, the inhabitants are shocked by the way Naomi looks, saying “is this Naomi?” She responds, “Do not call me *Naomi*, call me *Marah* (bitterness), for the Almighty has dealt with me extremely harshly.”
- Chapter 2: Ruth meets Boaz. Chapter 2 opens with the narrative telling us that Naomi has a wealthy relative, Boaz (strength is within him). Ruth informs Naomi that she is going to go out into the fields to glean, “with whomever I might find favor in his eyes.”⁵⁴³ Ruth happens on Boaz’s field. When Boaz comes to the field, he asks who this new woman is, and is told that she is, “the Moabite girl who returned with Naomi from the fields of Moab.” (2:6) Boaz instructs Ruth not to glean in any other fields, advizes her to follow “his girls” who are gleaning, tells her that he has told his men not to bother her, and invites her to partake of their water when she cares to. Ruth prostrates herself before Boaz

⁵³⁸ Literally “the house (or place) of bread.” Ironic that a story about people leaving due to famine is told about a famous city whose name is “house of bread.”

⁵³⁹ Eilmelech “God is my King,” an ironic name, given that this story tells us of the origins of King David.

⁵⁴⁰ Machlon and Chilion roughly translates to “sickness and destruction.” (See EJ “Mahlon and Chilion.”) It is only made clear in 4:10 that Ruth was married to Machlon, and Orpah to Chilion.

⁵⁴¹ Orpah = the back of her neck. So named because in the end she turns away from Naomi to return to her home.

⁵⁴² Some beautiful rabbinic midrashim take Ruth’s declaration as a formula for conversion. See my compilation “Selected Rabbinic Midrash on the Book of Ruth” at <http://www.templeisraeloflb.org/rabbi/ruthmdrs.pdf> page 2 and following.

⁵⁴³ In biblical law, individual stalks of wheat that fell during the process of reaping had to be left for the poor to gather for themselves, see Lev. 19:9-10 and EJ “Leket, Shikkhah, and Pe’ah.”

and asks him, “Why have I found favor in your eyes to take note of me, seeing as how I am a foreigner.” (2:10) Boaz explains, “It has been told to me all that you did for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband, and that you abandoned your father and mother and the land of our birth and came to a nation that you knew not yesterday nor the day before. May the LORD repay your deeds, and let your reward be complete from the LORD, God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to find refuge.” (2:11-2) Boaz continues to act very kindly toward Ruth, inviting her to repast with the reapers, and further instructing them about allowing her to glean. When she returns home in the evening, Naomi is impressed by how much Ruth has gleaned, saying “... let the one who treated you kindly be blessed ...” (2:19). When Ruth supplies Boaz’s name, Naomi says, “Blessed is he of the LORD who has not abandoned his righteousness with the living and the dead,” and she tells Naomi that Boaz is a close relative. Chapter 2 ends by telling us that Ruth continued to glean in Boaz’s field throughout the barley and wheat harvest.

- Chapter 3: Naomi plays matchmaker. Naomi tells Ruth that Naomi feels responsible to find her a good home. She instructs Ruth to bathe and perfume herself, and then to lie at Boaz’s feet when he goes to sleep, “and he will tell you what you are to do.” Ruth does so. When Boaz wakes in a state of shock and asks who is there, Ruth says, “I am Ruth your maidservant, spread your robe over your maidservant, for you are a redeeming kinsman.”⁵⁴⁴ Boaz is positively inclined, saying, “Be blessed by the LORD, my daughter, your final (i.e. most recent) kindness is greater than your first, in that you did not go after younger men, whether poor or rich.” (3:10) Boaz tells her not to worry, because he will do everything she asks, “for all of my people know that you are a woman of valor.” (3:11) However, Boaz says that there is a closer relative with the right/obligation to levirate marriage. “If he redeems you, good, let him redeem, but if he does not want to redeem you, I will redeem you ...” (3:13)
- Chapter 4: Boaz and Ruth marry and have a child. Boaz gathers ten elders and the potential levirite.⁵⁴⁵ He explains to the levirate Naomi wishes to sell the land of her husband, and that the levirate has the opportunity to redeem the land (i.e. purchase it and keep it to the closest family). At first, the gent agrees to redeem the land, but then Boaz explains to the gent that he must also take Ruth, so that she can have children, and thus keep her former-husband’s name associated with the land. The levirate refuses, for fear that it would make it more likely that his own land would go without his name remaining attached to it (since his first son would legally be the son of Ruth’s first husband). A ceremony is conducted demonstrating that Boaz has agreed to acquire all of Elimelech’s property, and agreed to take Ruth as a wife. The townspeople bare witness to this transaction, and bless both Ruth (“may the LORD make the woman who comes into your house as Rachel and Leah, the two of whom built the House of Israel . . . ” (4:11))⁵⁴⁶ and Boaz, (“May your house be like the house of Peretz, whom Tamar bore to Judah . . . ” (4:12)). We are told that Ruth bares a child, and Naomi serves as its caretaker. The child

⁵⁴⁴ Trans. Per JPS Tanakh. JPS indicates that the “spreading a robe” was a formal act of espousal.

⁵⁴⁵ Referred to as *ploni almoni*, the Hebrew equivalent to “So and so” or “John Doe.”

⁵⁴⁶ This blessing is related, clearly, to the traditional Friday night blessing of parents to their daughters, “May God make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.”

is named Oved (worshipper). The book closes with a genealogy of Peretz (son of Judah and Tamar) through Boaz and then through David.

NOTE: We covered the Book of Aycha out of order in our class as we got to Tisha b'Av.

6) Lamentations (Aycha)

The summary below is based on information from Encyclopedia Judaica “Lamentations”

Lamentations contains five poems lamenting the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the exile of the people in 586 B.C.E. It is traditionally read on the evening of the 9th of Av, as part of the commemoration of the destruction of the first and second Temples in Jerusalem, which occurred on the 9th of Av (*Tisha b'Av*). This book was known by the thematic title “*Kinot*” (lamentations), but now, like many books of the Bible, is known by the first word of the book, “Aycha.”

The five poems in Lamentations (each forming one chapter) are unique, each with its own areas of concentration. Theologically, the book falls within the area of “wisdom literature” in its resignation to the idea that suffering is the just result of wrongdoing (Arguably, Aycha is unique, however, in its sense of collective, rather than individual punishment).⁵⁴⁷ Trust is due to God, who will always respond to those who are repentant. In one manner of thinking, it is the fact that God’s rebuke is justified that gives rise to the hope that repentance could bring an end to suffering. Strikingly, although the destruction is a result of sin, Aycha says little about what sins lead to destruction, save for 4:13 mentioning the spilling of innocent blood by priests and prophets (or, alternatively, the verse could refer to unmentioned sins of the priests and prophets, and spilling of innocent blood by others, perhaps the ruling class). As EJ puts it, “Here in Lamentations it gives the impression of an attempt to account for a calamity which the author could not really explain.” Perhaps this is the most fitting response to the most profound of tragedies.

Also present in *Aycha* is a sense of the failure of all those people and institutions into which people put their trust – the Temple and its cult, the priests, the prophets, the city’s fortifications, king, soldiers, and defensive alliances. However, unlike the prophets, who often warned of the futility of trusting in such people and institutions (rather than relying on God), the speaker seems to have trusted these institutions, and to be disappointed by their failure.

Aycha uses many powerful literary techniques to produce a truly beautiful book of sorrow. The author describes the scene using many voices and persons, including male and female voices, first person (singular and plural) and third person speech, as well as presenting the words of Zion herself. The first four chapters are each written as alphabetical acrostics, as if to say that the suffering covered “a to z.” Chapter 3 is a triple acrostic. Though Chapter 5 is not an acrostic, it does contain 22 verses, the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. The word *Aycha* (“how”) opens chapters 1, 2, and 4 by introducing a tragic turn of events, much as that word is used in many other biblical works.⁵⁴⁸ Each poem ends on a note of prayer or confidence in the future, as

⁵⁴⁷ For more about the wisdom tradition, see the introduction to Proverbs, p. 170.

⁵⁴⁸ EJ says “cf. II Sam. 1:19ff.; Isa. 14:4ff.; Jer. 9:18; Zeph. 2:15”.

do many other biblical laments.⁵⁴⁹ Often, the verses can be broken up into several parts, with the final part of the verse somewhat shortened or cut-off, producing the effect of one so distraught that the person is unable to finish speaking the thought before choking on tears. As *Aycha* is poetry, and is further constrained by the strictures of the acrostic, there is less continuity from one verse to the next. However, some themes emerge within each chapter, as discussed below.

Many ascribe authorship of *Aycha* to the prophet Jeremiah, who we know witnessed the destruction and exile. But the book itself makes no claim of authorship, and other arguments can be raised to question this association. Some suggest that there may be several authors at work here. The author certainly seems to be intimately involved in the scene, so that these poems were likely written very close to the time of destruction. Although chapter 3 provides no time references, based on the way the scenes are presented in chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5, EJ tentatively suggests that these chapters are ordered chronologically, with chapter 1 being written before the burning of the Temple and Jerusalem, chapters 2 and 4 after the burning but before the deportation of the people was completed, and chapter 5 being some time later, as Jerusalem sits desolate, and the exile is complete.

The reading of *Aycha* in the synagogue on the 9th of Av features a particularly mournful tune, which helps captures the sense of tragedy that encompasses the book.⁵⁵⁰

A review of the content of *Aycha*:

- Chapter 1 of *Aycha* focuses on Jerusalem's stark loneliness – she is empty of people, exiled of her inhabitants and abandoned by her allies. The account begins with a third-person description of Jerusalem's suffering. "How (*Aycha*) she sits alone, the city that was once full of people has become like a widow. (She that was) great among nations, princess of states, has become a tributary. She cries at night, her tears upon her cheek – she has no consoler from among her friends; all her allies betrayed her, they became enemies to her." (1:1-2) "The ways of Zion are mourning, for there are no pilgrims, all her gates are desolate, her priests sigh, her maidens are distraught, and she is embittered." (1:4) "Jerusalem sinned, therefore she became defiled, all those who honored her despised her, for they saw her nakedness, she too sighs, and turns away." (1:8) Toward the end of 1:11, the narrative turns to the first-person voice of Jerusalem, which will continue for the rest of the chapter (except 1:17): "Her whole people sigh, seeking bread – giving their precious possessions for food to keep alive; 'Look, LORD and see, for I have become worthless. May it not happen to you, all who pass on the road – look and see – if there is suffering like my suffering which has been inflicted upon me, which the LORD has sent on the day of his burning wrath.'" (1:11-12) "For these things I cry. My eyes, my eyes flow with tears, for far away from me is any consoler, who might restore my spirit – my children are destitute, because the enemy has prevailed." (1:16) In the final verses of the chapter, Zion speaks of divine justice, and begs God to recognize Zion's suffering. "The LORD is righteous, for I disobeyed His words – hear this all nations, and see my suffering, my maidens and bachelors have gone into captivity." (1:18) "See, oh

⁵⁴⁹ EJ refers to "Ps. 28:6–9; 44:25–27; 74:19–23, et al."

⁵⁵⁰ You can find links to hear this reading by going to <http://www.torahforme.org/> clicking on "Leining Nach" and then clicking on "Eicha."

LORD, that I am afflicted – my bowels are tormented, my heart has turned in my stomach, for I have greatly rebelled (alt: I am greatly embittered), outside the sword bereaves,indoors is like death (JPS: “Indoors, the plague.”)” (1:20)

- Chapter 2, speaks most directly of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, stressing God’s role in this destruction. This chapter also begins with a third-person voice, briefly transfers to Zion’s voice in verse 11, and then addresses Jerusalem and Jerusalem’s wall directly, including a call for Jerusalem (or its wall) to cry out to God. “How (Aycha) the LORD has covered the Daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger, sent from heaven to earth the majesty of Israel, failed to remember his footstool (JPS: i.e. the Temple) on the day of His wrath.” (2:1) “He bent His bow as an enemy, set his right hand as a foe, and killed all who were pleasing to the eye, in the tent of the Daughter of Zion (i.e. the Temple?) he poured out his wrath like fire. The LORD acted as an enemy, swallowed up Israel, swallowed up her castles, destroyed her strongholds, and made great for the Daughter of Judah lamenting and moaning.” (2:4-5) “My eyes are out of tears, my bowels are tormented, my liver is spilled to the ground for the destruction of the daughter of my people, as little ones and suckling infants faint in the streets of the city.” (2:11) “What can I tell you, to what can I liken you, oh Daughter of Jerusalem. To what can I compare you to console you, maiden Daughter of Zion, for your destruction is as great as the sea, who can heal you? Your prophets prophesied to you with falsehood and worthlessness, not exposing your sins so as to restore (perhaps = avoid) your captivity; they prophesied to you false and deceptive visions.” (2:13-14) “All who pass clap their hands at you⁵⁵¹, they hiss and shake their heads toward the Daughter of Zion [saying] (about Jerusalem), ‘Is this the city that they called perfectly beautiful, the pride of the entire land?’” (2:15) “Arise, cry out at night, at the beginning of the watch pour out your heart as water toward God; raise up your hands to Him for the life of your little ones who faint from hunger at the beginning of every street, (saying) ‘Look, Oh LORD, and see, to whom you have done this. Should women eat their children, their cherished little ones? Should priest and prophet be slain in the Temple of God? Lying on the ground in the street are youth and elderly, my maidens and bachelors have fallen by sword – you have killed on the day of your wrath, slaughtered and taken no pity.’” (2:19-21)
- Chapter 3 focuses on the immense suffering and the meaning of that suffering. God is justified in punishing the people. Acceptance of divine judgment and return to God are the path toward hope. In 3:1-39 the suffering is personal and individual. In verse 40-47 the words are first person plural, representing the nation’s suffering. The singular voice returns in 48-66, first mourning the fate of the city, and then returning to the theme of verses 1-39, that of personal suffering. “I am the man who saw suffering through the wrath of His staff.” (3:1) “He crushed my teeth with gravel, has made me cower in ashes.⁵⁵² I said that God took my strength and my hope. Remember my troubles and misery, the wormwood and gall. My soul surely remembers and is downcast in me. Thus shall I respond to my heart, and therefore I will have hope: ‘the LORD’s righteousness is unending, for his mercy has not ceased. They are renewed every morning – your

⁵⁵¹ Per JPS, clapping of hands is a gesture to ward off a similar calamity. Cf Jer. 18:16 and Job 27:23.

⁵⁵² Verse translated per Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament.

faithfulness is great.' ‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, therefore I place my hope in him. The LORD is good to those who trust him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good to hope silently for the LORD’s salvation. It is good for a person to carry a yoke while young. . . . Let him turn his cheek to the one that strikes him, [let him] be sated with insults. For the LORD will not spurn forever, but rather punishes and forgives in accordance with His great mercy.⁵⁵³ Who can speak and do without God commanding? Does not good and evil come from the words of the Most High? How can a living man complain about his own sins!”⁵⁵⁴ (3:16-27, 30-32, 37-39) As the narrative turns to the first person plural, the theme of resignation continues: “Let us search out our ways and investigate [our ways], and return to the LORD. . . . We sinned and rebelled, you did not forgive.” (3:40, 42). As the single-speaker returns, he speaks first of the communal destruction - “My eyes have brought my soul grief for [what happened] to all the daughters of my city.” (v. 51) - and then returns to speak of individual fate, - They ended my life in a pit and threw stones at me.” (v. 53) The speaker again talks of faith in God at the time of calamity: “I called your name, oh LORD, from the depths of the pit. You heard my voice, do not deafen your ear to my cry for help.” (3:55-56) The speaker speaks of how God has seen all that the enemies have done to the speaker, and asks God to punish them, “Give them sorrow of the heart, let your curse be upon them. Chase in anger and destroy them from under the heavens of the LORD⁵⁵⁵.” (3:66)

- Chapter 4 turns its focus to the suffering of Jerusalem’s inhabitants, and particularly how fortunes have changed. The poem starts in the third person singular, with 17-20 being in first person plural, and concludes with words of warning to Edom⁵⁵⁶ and hope for Zion. “The tongue of the suckling child has cleaved to his palate in thirst, little ones ask for bread, but there is none who gives them. Those who ate delicacies are starving in the streets; those raised on purple (a royal color) have embraced garbage heaps.” (4:5-6) “The hands of compassionate women boiled their children; they became their food, in the destruction of the daughter of my people.” (4:10) “The kings of the land did not believe, [nor did] all the inhabitants of the land that an adversary and an enemy would come into the gates of Jerusalem. Because of the sins of the prophets, iniquities of the priests, who spill blood in her midst – the blood of the righteous.”⁵⁵⁷ (4:12-13) “Rejoice and be happy, Daughter of Edom (i.e. enjoy success for now), who dwells in the land of Uz; the cup shall also pass to you – you will become drunk and will be stripped naked. Your iniquity

⁵⁵³ In this light, punishment is viewed as a facilitator of forgiveness

⁵⁵⁴ I.e. punishment is the just result of our sins, and thus our fault, so how can we complain.

⁵⁵⁵ It is not surprising that there would be hope for punishment of Israel’s antagonists. Although Israel’s punishment is just, that does not mean that Israel’s enemies are blameless for their evil. Instead, their evil is a tool that God is using to punish Israel. Cf. above p. 74 footnote 167 and accompanying text.

⁵⁵⁶ We have previously discussed that Edom participated in, and benefited from, the destruction of Jerusalem. See above, p. 116 footnote 298 and accompanying text.

⁵⁵⁷ It is not clear whether the prophets and/or priests are accused of spilling of blood, or if the subject of the last phrase is a third group of evildoers.

(i.e. punishment) has been completed⁵⁵⁸, Daughter of Zion, He will no longer exile you; He will note your iniquity, daughter of Edom, He will uncover your sin.” (4:21-22)

- Chapter 5 is a collective (i.e. first person plural) prayer for God to take note of what has happened to the people. Recall that we mentioned above that this poem may be speaking in a somewhat later time than the previous chapters, after the destruction and exile were complete. “Remember, oh LORD what has happened to us, look and see our disgrace!” (5:1) The poet describes the unending pursuit of the enemy, how the people had to turn to others (Assyria, Egypt) to buy bread (v. 4-6) and how the enemy defiled women, killed princes, and showed no regard for the elderly (v. 11-12). “Our fathers sinned and are no longer, and we beared their iniquity.”⁵⁵⁹ The book of *Aycha* closes with a message of hopeful prayer, although depending how the last verse is read, even this verse may indicate doubts about the future: “You, God, are enthroned forever, your throne is for all generations. Why should you forget us forever, [why should you] abandon us for so many days? Return us, Oh LORD to you, and we will return, restore our days as of old.⁵⁶⁰ *Ki im* (=because or unless) you have utterly spurned us and are exceedingly angry with us.”⁵⁶¹ (5:19-22)

NOTE: We covered the Book of Esther out of order in our class as we got to Purim.

8) Esther

For further background on Esther, see the introduction to the Book of Esther in in the JPS Bible Commentary on Esther and the Encyclopedia Judaica article on the Book of Esther.

Megillat Esther, The Book of Esther (AKA “The Megillah”) is perhaps one of the most famous stories from the Bible. It features the heroine, Esther, and her uncle and adoptive father Mordechai. Esther ascends to the position of Queen by way of a beauty contest, and helps to foil the plot of Haman to kill the Jewish people of Persia. The Megillah is read on Purim, both at

⁵⁵⁸ I.e. Israel has paid for its sins, and therefore will be punished no longer. A similar sentiment is expressed, among other places, at Isaiah 40 (the Haftorah read on the Shabbat after the 9th of Av). See above p. 80 footnote 176 and accompanying text.

⁵⁵⁹ EJ notes that this statement echoes the popular view expressed in Jeremiah (31:29) and Ezekiel (18:2) that “The fathers ate sour grapes, and the teeth of the sons were set on edge.” (See above p. 111, text accompanying footnote 278). However, the poem is not claiming that the current generation is blameless (see e.g. 5:16, “woe to us, for we have sinned.”) Instead, EJ suggests “by invoking the sins of the fathers as at least partial explanation, he shows how difficult it was for him—quite unlike the classical prophets—to discover a sufficient measure of sinfulness in his own generation.”

⁵⁶⁰ Note that that this verse is the verse traditionally recited as the ark is closed after the Torah is returned to the ark in the Torah service.

⁵⁶¹ This verse can be interpreted in two very different ways. The speaker may be following on the previous verse, and asking God to reconcile with Israel because God had rejected and been angry with the people. Alternatively, this verse may provide the reason why God might “forget us forever/abandon us for so many days” as suggested in verse 20. It is striking that although most Biblical books look to end on a note of hope, the author is unable to muster an unambiguously hopeful ending.

night and during the day. Though the Megillah can be read any time at night and any time during the day, many synagogues have readings of the Megillah during evening and morning services.

Scholars debate when to date the Book of Esther, estimates ranging from 400 to 200BCE. Its many references to other biblical stories attest to it being a very late book.

While the contents of the book of Esther are relatively famous, and the work seems simple, The Megillah is actually fascinating from a literary perspective. The story told seems satirical/farcical. However, we do know that there was a king named Achashverosh (Greek – Xerxes, Xerxes I reigned from 486 to 465 BCE). We also have evidence of a royal official named Marduka. Encyclopedia Judaica notes that the Megillah is familiar with Persian custom, including that a woman (such as Queen Vashti) would generally not attend a drinking party. Nevertheless, there is much in the story that seems implausible (e.g. the Persian king so easily manipulated, a beauty pageant for the role of queen⁵⁶²) or inconsistent (e.g. how did Esther, adoptive daughter of Mordechai, who was known in the palace, conceal her Jewish identity?). Many scholars speculate as to other ideas of who may be referred to in this story, and how it may work on a satirical level or as a reference to other chapters of history.

JPS argues that while the background information seems historically accurate, the plot itself is relatively implausible, and therefore the work may be an ancient example of historical fiction, adding that “The distinction between history and story, which is such an important issue for us, would not have engaged readers in the Persian period in the same way it does us. To the ancient reader, an imaginative story was just as worthy, or even as holy, as a historically accurate one, so to declare Esther to be imaginative does not in any way detract from its value.” Interestingly, the fact that the Megillah entered the Jewish cannon (see below), may have obscured our ability to appreciate its comedic nature. The JPS introduction gives many examples of the comedy, including Haman’s misunderstanding Achashverosh’s desire to honor Mordechai, believing instead that the king wanted to honor Haman (see the chapter summary), and Achashverosh’s real or pretend misunderstanding of Haman’s presence on Esther’s couch.⁵⁶³ I would add my personal favorite, a satire of man’s concern for dominating women, found in the reaction to Vashti’s refusal to appear before the king.⁵⁶⁴ Each character is also seemingly a caricature: Achashverosh a drunk, bumbling monarch, Esther a feminine hero, Mordechai the wise man, and Haman the self important, pompous, and vengeful villain. There is also significant exaggeration: The story starts with a 180-day party, the beauty pageant participants prepare for one year (six months of oily of myrrh, and six months of perfuming, 2:12), a fifty cubit gallows⁵⁶⁵ (5:14), etc.

The Megillah was subject of debate as to whether it should be a part of the Jewish cannon , as it is not overtly religious. It lacks any reference to God or to particularly Jewish religious practice.

⁵⁶² Though, in the age of reality TV this seems a bit less implausible than it once did.

⁵⁶³ In Chapter 7, when Esther reveals Haman’s plot, the Achashverosh storms out in anger. Haman begs Esther for mercy, “falling on her bed.” When Achashverosh returns, he asks, “Do you also intend to ravage the Queen with me in the palace?” (7:8)

⁵⁶⁴ 1:16-22.

⁵⁶⁵ Around 75 feet.

Esther, perhaps more than any other biblical book is ripe with references to other books. For example (examples are fleshed out in JPS):

- The Joseph Story: Mordechai, like Joseph, ascends to a prominent position under the king. In both works, a Jews ascendancy to power is used to protect their family and people. The kings sleeplessness plays a significant role in the saving of the people (in the Joseph story because Joseph interprets the dream, in Esther because the king is reminded of Mordechai's heroism during a sleepless night). There are also verses that bear remarkable similarity, e.g. Gen. 39:10 re: Potiphar's wife trying to seduce Joseph "*And it was when she spoke to Joseph day after day and he did not listen to her to lie with her and be with her.*" and Esther 3:4 re: the kings courtiers observing Mordechai's refusal to bow before Haman: "*And it was as they spoke to him day by day, and he did not listen to them . . .*"
- 1 Samuel 15: Haman is identified as an Agagite, i.e. a descendent of the King of Amalek who was killed by Samuel after Saul failed to do so. Mordechai is also from the line of Saul.⁵⁶⁶ Esther notes that the Jews were permitted to take booty from their vanquished enemies, but did not do so, whereas Saul allowed booty to be taken from the war with Amalek, where he was instructed not to by the prophet Samuel. In Esther 1:19, Achashverosh is advised regarding Vashti, "Give her queenship to her fellow who is better than she," calling to mind 1 Samuel 15:28 where Samuel says to Saul, "The LORD has stripped the kingship of Israel from you today and given it to your fellow who is better than you."
- The Book of Kings: At the beginning of Kings, there is a search throughout the land for a young beautiful maiden to keep King David warm, much as there is a search for a queen in Esther. The attempt of Adoniah to succeed David instead of Solomon reported in 1 Kings 1-2 may be reflected in Haman's attempt for power. David's Queen Batsheva speaks to King David about this, much as Esther speaks to the King about Haman's plot. The "right" person ends up riding on the king's horse (1 Kings 33, 44; Esther 6:11), and the "wrong" one ends up dead. Also, both kings ask their queens, "*mah lach* – what is the matter for you" (1 Kings 1:16, Esther 5:3). We are told in 10:2 that all the acts of the king, including his promoting Mordechai are recorded in his chronicles, similar to the Book of Kings where we are told that a particular king's exploits are recorded in the chronicles of the Kings of Israel, see e.g. 1 Kings 14:29, 15:31.
- Daniel 1-6 tells of Daniel who becomes high ranking members of the royal court despite his ethnic background. The description of the courts are similar. Daniel and Mordechai have rivals who plan to kill them.

The book of Esther seems to exhibit a chiastic structure⁵⁶⁷:

- A. Power of Ahasuerus (1:1-3)
- B. Ahasuerus's feast (1:4-6)
- C. Ring given to Haman (3:10)
- C. First decree of king - to destroy Jews (3:14)
- D. Esther's 1st banquet, Haman builds gallows (ch 5)
- E. King's sleepless night (6:1) TURNING POINT
- D. Esther's 2nd banquet, Haman swings from gallows (ch 7)
- C. Ring given to Mordechai (8:2)

⁵⁶⁶ See Esther 2:5, Mordechai's great grandfather, Kish is Saul's father.

⁵⁶⁷ See footnote 113 above.

- C. Second decree of king - Jews to defend themselves (8:13)
- B. Jews' feast of Purim (ch 9)
- A. Power of Mordecai (ch 10)⁵⁶⁸

A brief outline of the book is as follows:

- Chapter 1: King Achashverosh of Persia has a huge party. At the end of the party he calls for his queen, Vashti, to appear. She refuses, setting off fears that women will not be obedient to their husbands. On advice of his counsel, Achashverosh removes Vashti from her position.
- Chapter 2: The King misses his queen, and a beauty pageant is created for the King to choose a new Queen. Esther enters the contest. Mordechai tells her to keep her Judaism a secret. Esther wins the contest and becomes queen. We are also told that Mordechai, who used to hang out at the palace gates, overhears two of the king's eunuchs plot to kill the king. Mordechai overhears the plot and tells Esther. Esther tells the king.⁵⁶⁹ The matter is investigated, the eunuchs executed, and the goings-on are recorded in the annals.
- Chapter 3: Achashverosh elevates Haman over all of his servants. On the king's orders, everyone in the court bows before Haman. However, Mordechai refuses to do so.⁵⁷⁰ When Haman finds this out, he resolves to take revenge not only on Mordechai, but upon his people, the Jewish people.⁵⁷¹ Haman draws lots⁵⁷² and decides on the month of Adar as the month to commit a genocide against the Jewish people. Haman tells the king that the Jewish people are refusing to follow the king's orders, and offers to pay the king for the right to kill the Jews. Achashverosh gives Haman his signet ring (i.e. giving Haman carte blanche to do as he pleases), and tells Haman to keep his money. Haman has the king's scribes write orders to all provinces of Persia for all Jews to be killed on the thirteenth of Adar.
- Chapter 4: Mordechai hears of Haman's plot. He tears his clothes and wears sackcloth and ashes. Jews fast and cry. Mordechai asks Esther (through one of her servants) to talk to the Achashverosh, but Esther originally refuses because it was not permissible to go before the king unless one was summoned, and she hadn't been summoned in some time.

⁵⁶⁸ Julian Spriggs, Introduction to the Book of Esther, <http://julianspriggs.com/esther.aspx>. A more intricate study of the chiasms in Esther can be accessed from <http://www.inthebeginning.org/chiasmus/xfiles.htm>.

⁵⁶⁹ Esther 2:22 Tells us, "... And Esther told the King in the name of Mordechai," i.e. telling the King that it was Mordechai who discovered the plot. Based on this verse, Pirkei Avot (6:6) teaches that "One who says something in the name of the person who said it (i.e. cites his sources) brings redemption to the world." See the events of Chapter 6.

⁵⁷⁰ We are not told exactly why Mordechai refuses. We do know that Haman is described in 3:1 as an Agagite, i.e. a descendant of Agag, King of Amalek (see 1 Kings 15). The Amalekites are the people who attacked Israel as they left Egypt (see Ex. 17:8-13), a source of perpetual enmity between Amalek and Israel (See Ex. 17:14-17, Deut. 25:17-19, and 1 Kings 15). Perhaps this is the source of Mordechai's refusal, although many interpretations argue that the refusal is on religious grounds.

⁵⁷¹ Note the parallel to Vashti. An unexplained refusal to follow the King's orders is met with an exaggerated response (See JPS on 3:3).

⁵⁷² Lot = *pur*, hence the name of the holiday, *Purim*.

One who appeared uninvited could be executed if the king did not approve of their presence. Mordechai responds by telling Esther that her royal position would not protect her. He tells Esther that if she does not act then the Jews will be saved somehow else, but “who knows whether it was for a moment like this that you ascended to the throne.” (4:14)⁵⁷³ Esther agrees to approach the king, but only after all the Jews in Shushan (the capital city) fast for three days.

- Chapter 5: Esther approaches the king, who does approve of her presence, asking “What is the matter with you, Esther the Queen, and what is it that you would ask, up to half of the kingdom, and it will be given to you.” (4:3) Esther invites the king and Haman to a party. During the party, while the king is drunk, he asks what Esther wants again (up to half the kingdom), and she asks for the king and Haman to come to a second party. On his way home from the party, Haman, honored to be the one invitee besides the king to these two parties, has his mood changed when he passes by Mordechai, who doesn’t acknowledge him. Haman speaks with his friends and his wife about how upset he is. Haman is advised by his wife to build a gallows and to ask the king for permission to hang Mordechai.
- Chapter 6: Back in the palace, the King has not been able to sleep, and has his annals read to him. It so happens, that the story about how Mordechai uncovered the assassination plot (see Chapter 2) is read. The king asks how Mordechai was rewarded, and finds out that Mordechai was not rewarded in any way. Ironically, Haman arrives on scene at that moment to ask for permission to hang Mordechai. But the King asks him first: “What should be done to a person whom the King desires to honor,” (6:5). Haman reasons that the king’s desire is to honor Haman. So Haman says that what should be done is the person should be dressed in the kings clothing, ride on the kings horse, wearing the kings crown, led by one of the kings servants, and ridden through the city with people yelling before him, “Thus shall be done to a person whom the King desires to honor,” Achashverosh instructs Haman to provide this pomp and circumstance for Mordechai. And so, Haman is made to lead Achashverosh through the streets! Haman comes home dejected, and his advisors tell him that he will not succeed in his plot against the Jews. As they are speaking, the king’s eunuchs come to pick up Haman for Esther’s party.
- Chapter 7: At the party, Achashverosh, drunk, asks Esther what she wants (again, up to half the kingdom). Esther asks, “If I have found favor in your eyes, and if it is pleasing to the king, that you might give me my life on my asking, and my people on my request.” Esther explains that her people had been sold to be killed. The King asks who has planned to do so, and Esther said it was Haman. As the king gets angry at Haman, a servant Charvona tells Achashverosh about the gallows that Haman had built to hang Mordechai, the man who had saved the king’s life. Achashverosh orders Haman hung on the gallows, whereupon the king’s anger is assuaged.
- Chapter 8: Esther, her identity now known, introduces Mordechai to Achashverosh. Achashverosh gives his ring to Mordechai. Esther asks Achashverosh to cancel Haman’s genocidal orders. Achashverosh tells them that a king’s orders can not be revoked, but that they may write whatever they want to the Jews of Persia and seal it with the king’s

⁵⁷³ A great message for those who rise to power or privilege and would not risk that position by taking a controversial or risky stand: Maybe this issue is precisely why you ascended to your position.

seal. Mordechai and Esther send a message to the Jews to defend themselves from their enemies on the 13th of Adar. As each province receives the message, the Jewish community celebrates, and many convert to Judaism out of fear of the Jews.

- Chapter 9 tells us of the Jews killing those who would attack them, of Mordechai ascending to a prominent position in the palace, and the hanging of Haman's ten sons. The King hears a report of 500 dead in Shushan. He asks Esther what she would like to do (again, up to getting half the kingdom). Esther asks for permission for the Jews of Shushan to carry on as they had for one more day. The Jews of the rest of the land of Persia thus have a celebration on the 14th day of Adar, while the Jews of Shushan keep fighting for one more day, and celebrate on the 15th day of Adar.⁵⁷⁴ Mordechai sends messages to all the Jews of the kingdom to establish the 14th/15th day of Adar as a day of celebration in perpetuity, a day of celebration, giving food to one another, and giving charity to the poor. The Jews accept Mordechai's instructions. The final verses of Chapter 9 summarize the story.
- Chapter 10 tells us that Achashverosh placed a tax on his people.⁵⁷⁵ We are told that all the acts of the king, including his promoting Mordechai are recorded in his chronicles⁵⁷⁶ and how Mordechai became the king's second in command.

⁵⁷⁴ This extra day of violence is the reason why there is "Shushan Purim," where cities that were walled cities at the time of Joshua celebrate Purim one day later than everyone else, see Esther 9:19.

⁵⁷⁵ The relevance of this information is unclear. Perhaps it is a reversal of a tax remission that was ordered during Esther's appointment (2:18), or it may be meant as a reference to the story of Joseph, who helped Pharaoh amass wealth (JPS on 10:1).

⁵⁷⁶ This seems to be a reference to the places in the bible, particularly in the Book of Kings where we are told that a particular king's exploits are recorded in the chronicles of the Kingss of Israel, see e.g. 1 Kings 14:29, 15:31 (JPS on 10:2).

GLOSSARY

'אֱלֹהִים: Is used in many printings instead of writing out God's name. It is generally pronounced *adonay*, although sometimes is pronounced *elohim*.

Ahashverosh: King of Persia in *Megillat Esther*. See: Megillat Esther.

Akeida: The Binding of Isaac. Tells the story of God telling Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham's willingness to do so, and God's stopping Abraham in the end. This section of the Bible is recited by many every morning, together with a prayer that God remember Abraham's actions when deciding how to treat us.

Aliyah: Generally used as a term for any synagogue honor. Specifically used to refer to those who go up to the Torah during a Torah reading.

Amidah: AKA "Shemoneh Esreh," ("18") after the fact that the weekday *Amidah* originally had 18 blessings. Basic component of Jewish prayer. Each Jewish prayer service contains an *Amidah*.

Amos: Third prophet anthologized in the "Minor Prophets," and one of the earliest prophets about whom there is a book. He prophesied mostly to the Northern Kingdom of Israel ca. 8th Century BE.

Anim Zemirot: Mystic poem ascribed to 12th century German scholar and mystic Yehudah Hachasid.

Arvit: AKA "Ma'ariv." Evening prayer.

Ashkenazi(c): Jewish communities of Eastern Europe, as opposed to Sephardic communities, which hail from Spain and other Mediterranean areas.

Ashrei: Combination of Psalm 84:5, Psalm 144:15, Psalm 145, and Psalm 115:18. Used at many points in prayer. It is recited twice in the morning, and once in the afternoon service.

Aycha: See "Lamentations."

Ayn Kelohenu: A hymn often said on Shabbat and holidays about how there is no one like God.

Baal: A pagan god.

Babylonian Talmud: Document of discussions of rabbis concerning Jewish law, philosophy, legend, etc. compiled somewhere in about the 5th or 6th century in Babylonia (modern day Iraq). Often referred to as "The Talmud," as opposed to a similar compilation, the "Jerusalem Talmud" which was likely completed around the beginning of the 5th century. The Talmuds both function as a commentary on the Mishnah (defined at footnote 4).

Barechu: The call to worship

Beracha Levatalah: A vain blessing. Refers to a blessing said outside of the proper context.

Bereshit: See Genesis.

Beth Midrash: “House of study.” Originally this referred to a place of study, though now it is often used to refer to a smaller chapel in a synagogue.

Beth Mikdash: Holy Temple in Jerusalem. The first Temple was destroyed ca. 586 BCE, the second ca. 70 CE.

Bimah: The raised area towards the front (sometimes the middle) of the synagogue from where the *Chazzan* does the prayers, and the *Torah* is read.

Birkat Ha’torah: The blessing on the study of Torah.

Birchot Hashachar: “Morning blessings.” Blessings designed to be said as certain things happened in the morning. Now generally said at the beginning of synagogue services.

Birchot Keriat Shema: The blessings which come before and after the *Shema*.

Chalitzah: Ceremony for refusing a leverite marriage (Yibbum)

Chazarat HaSha”ts: the repetition of the *Amidah* done by the cantor.

Chazzan: Cantor. This refers not necessarily to a professional cantor, but to whoever functions as the leader of the particular prayer service. Another term often used is *shaliach tsibur* (known also by the acronym *sha”ts*), which means “the representative of the congregation.”

Chiasm: So named for the Greek letter Chi (X), a chiastic structure is an ABCC’B’A” type of structure and is quite prevalent in the Bible. It comes up both within verses, as well as in the ordering of narratives. Examples:

Cohen/Cohanim: The Jewish priestly class, descendants of Aaron.

David: Second King of Israel. He and his son Solomon presided over the people during the glory days of the republic.

De’orayta: “From the Torah.” Refers to commandments that are considered to be derived from the Torah (i.e. the Five Books of Moses).

Deuteronomy: Known traditionally as *מִשְׁנֶה תּוֹרָה* (*Mishneh Torah*, The Second Torah), but now generally known as *Devarim* (“Words”) after the second word in the book. In large part, the book reads as three farewell addresses delivered by Moses, almost entirely presented by Moses

in the first person singular, and providing a review of and supplement to the laws commanded by God and Israelite history.

Devarim: See Deuteronomy.

Devarim shebikdusha: “Holy matters.” Prayers which may only be recited with a Minyan. E.g. *Kaddish, Kedushah, barechu*.

Derabanan: “From the Rabbis.” Refers to commandments that are considered to be created by the Rabbis, and not supported by biblical text.

Duchaning: Named after the podium (*duchan*) that the *Cohanim* (Priests) stood on in the Temple when delivering the Priestly blessing, this is the act of the *Cohanim* going up to the *Bimah* to do the Priestly blessing during the Repetition of the *Amidah*.

Elijah: One of the great prophets of Israel. He is prevalent in the Book of Kings. Becomes a mythical character in Judaism partially because he does not die, but is taken up to heaven in a whirlwind.

Elisha: Protégé of Elijah, who became a great prophet himself upon Elijah’s being taken up in a whirlwind.

Ephraim: One of the twelve sons of Jacob, and the name of one of the 12 tribes of Israel. Sometimes, the name Ephraim is used synonymously with the Northern Kingdom of Israel after the split of the kingdom. See “Northern Kingdom.”

Esther: Heroine of *Megillat Esther*. See: *Megillat Esther*.

Etrog: See “Lulav and Etrog.”

Exodus: The second book of the Torah. Known in Hebrew traditionally as סִפְרֵי יְצֵאת מִצְרָיִם / *Sifrei Yetz’at Mitzrayim*, or *the book of the departure from Egypt*, but now generally known as *Shemot* (Names) after the second word in the book. This Book tells of the Israelite’s slavery in Egypt, their departure from Egypt, and the beginning of their trek through the Sinai wilderness towards Israel. This book also includes the revelation at Sinai with the Ten Commandments as well as many other laws commanded by God.

Ezekiel: A major prophet during the period before and after the destruction of the First Temple. A prophetic book in his name is the third of the *nevi’im acharonim* (latter prophets) and is the third of three so-called “major prophets.”

Genesis: בְּרֵאשִׁית = (*Bereshit*, in the beginning). Covers the story of creation through the death of Joseph.

Gehenim: The Jewish version of Hell.

Genesis: The first book of the Torah. known in Hebrew בְּרֵאשִׁית = (*Bereshit*, in the beginning). Covers the story of creation through the death of Joseph.

Habakuk: Eighth prophet anthologized in the “Minor Prophets.” Nothing is known about Habakuk, thought there is reason to speculate that he lived during the rise of the Babylonian empire that would destroy Jerusalem (i.e. ca. 600 B.C.E.).

Haftorah: A selection from the prophets read after the Torah is read on Shabbat and holidays. Each *Haftorah* is either related to that week’s Torah reading, to the given holiday, or to something of significance on the calendar.

Hagbah and Gelilah: Ritual lifting and tying of the Torah after it has been read.

Haggai: Tenth prophet anthologized in the 12 minor prophets. His recorded prophecies date to 520 B.C.E. although there is indication that he was quite influential for some time (see E.J. “Haggai.”)

Halacha: Jewish law.

Hallel: Recited on holidays and on *Rosh Chodesh*, *Hallel* is psalms 113-118, with a blessing before and after it.

Haman: Vilain of *Megillat Esther*. See: Megillat Esther.

Horeb: Another name for Sinai.

Hosea: First prophet anthologized in the “Minor Prophets,” and one of the earliest prophets about whom there is a book. Hosea prophesied to the Northern Kingdom of Israel before its destruction ca. 8th Century BE.

Isaiah: A major prophet during the late eight century BCE. The Book of Isaiah is the first of the *Nevi’im Acharonim* (Latter Prophets).

Jeremiah: A major prophet, operating circa 627-586. The Book of Jeremiah is the second of the *Nevi’im Acharonim* (Latter Prophets).

Jerusalem Talmud: AKA “Talmud Yerushalmi” or the “Palestinian Talmud.” See Babylonian Talmud for more information.

Job: Biblical book (part of Ketuvim) telling the story of a righteous man, Job, who is beset by tragedy. This book grapples with the issue of a perceived lack of divine justice in the world.

Joel: Second prophet anthologized in the “Minor Prophets.” Nothing is known about his history.

Jonah: Fifth prophet anthologized in the “Minor Prophets.” The book describes the famed story of Jonah’s being commanded to prophecy to the people of Nineveh, Jonah’s attempt to avoid this mission, and his disappointment in eventually carrying out the mission to a success.

Joshua: First book of the Nevi’im (Prophets) section of the Bible. Tells the story of the prophet Joshua’s leadership of the Israelites in their conquest of Israel.

Judges: Second book of Nevi’im (Prophets). The main theme is several episodes in which Israel turns idolatry leading to their oppression at the hands of enemies. They return to God, who sends a prophet/warrior (known as a judge) to save them.

Kabbalat Shabbat: Friday night service welcoming the Sabbath.

Kaddish: A prayer for God’s dominion over the world. Said only when a *minyan* is present (10 people including those who are reciting Kaddish). It takes several forms:

1. Half Kaddish, recited by the *Chazzan*.
2. Full Kaddish (AKA *Kaddish Titkabal*), recited by the *Chazzan* which adds a prayer for God to accept our prayers.
3. Mourner’s Kaddish, which is recited by mourners and those observing a *Yahrzeit*.
4. Rabbi’s Kaddish (*Kaddish Derabanan*). Which is recited by mourners and those observing a *Yahrzeit* after words of Rabbinic homily have been said. This form of Kaddish adds a prayer for the Rabbis.

Kedushah: Special declaration of God’s praise, which can only be recited with a Minyan. It is part of the repetition of the *Amidah*.

Kedushah Desidrah: “The *Kedushah* of Study.” This prayer has as its mainstay the three verses that are at the center of the *Kedushah* (see above “Additions” p. 23) along with Aramaic translations of these lines. Opinions vary as to whether this part should be said without an *Amidah*.

Kedushat Hayom: “The Sanctification of the Day.” The middle blessing of the Sabbath and Holiday *Amidah*, which refers to the day which is being observed.

Ketuvim: (כְּתִיבִים, Writings). Third of three major subdivisions of the Bible. It includes a varied set of literature including prayers and psalms, philosophical explorations, and apocalyptic literature, and poetry.

Kings: I and II Kings are the fifth and sixth books of Nevi’im (Prophets). The main theme is the continuation of the Davidic dynasty, the split of the Israelite kingdom into two, and the eventual destruction of both kingdoms.

Korbanot: Sacrifices. Section of morning service discussing the laws of sacrifices. This is done in the hopes that our discussion of those laws may be viewed by G-d as if we had in fact given those sacrifices. Skipped by many synagogues.

Lamentations (Aycha): Originally referred to as “*Kinot*” (Lamentations). One of the books of *Ketuvim*, the third section of the Bible. The book contains five poems lamenting the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the exile of the people in 586 B.C.E. It is traditionally read on the evening of the 9th of Av, as part of the commemoration of the destruction of the first and second Temple in Jerusalem, which occurred on the 9th of Av.

Leverite Marriage (Yibum): A rite whereby a close relative (usually the brother) of a man who dies without children is supposed to marry the man’s wife, per Deut. 25:5-6. If a man elects not to perform the leverite marriage, a ceremony called *chalitzah* (“the removal of the shoe”) is performed, as prescribed in Deut. 25:7-10. See further footnote 535 on page 155.

Levi: A descendant of the tribe of Levi. Some of the Levites were separated out in to the Cohanim, the priestly class. The rest of the Levites served as helpers in the Beth Hamikdash.

Leviticus: The third book of the Torah. Known in Hebrew traditionally as תְּרוּמָה כַּהֲנִים *the Torah of the Priests*, but now generally known as *Vayikra* (Called) after the first word in the book. This Book concentrates mostly on ritual law, though it contains significant portions of civil law as well.

Lulav and Etrog. A bouquet of palm, myrtle, and willow branches, along with the citron fruit used during the holiday of Sukkot (see “Sukkot”).

Ma'ariv: AKA “Arvit.” Evening Service.

Maimonides: Rabbi Moses (AKA Moses ben (son of) Maimon, or by his acronym RaMBa”m) (1135-1204). Rabbi and philosopher. Authored a commentary on the Mishnah (a compilation of rabbinic teachings from the late 2nd century), a code of Jewish law known as the Mishneh Torah, and famed philosophical work, “The Guide to the Perplexed.”

Malachi: 12th and last prophet anthologized in the “Minor Prophets.” Probably dating to approximately 500 B.C.E.

Mechitzah: “Division.” Refers to something (a wall, balcony, etc) which separates men and women during prayer.

Megillat Esther: The scroll of Esther, one of the books of *Ketuvim*, the third section of the Bible. The scroll is the story of Esther, and her uncle and adoptive father Mordechai. Esther ascends to the position of Queen by way of a beauty contest, and helps to foil the plot of Haman to kill the Jewish people of Persia.

Mezuzah: Scroll of several paragraphs of scripture placed on doorposts (generally in a casing of some sort).

Micah: Sixth prophet anthologized in the “Minor Prophets.” He prophiced about the destruction of both Samaria (capital of the Northern Kingdom) and Jerusalem. He operated during the late eighth and early seventh century B.C.E..

Mi Sheberach: Literally means “he who blessed.” Type of prayer which begins, “May he who blessed our forbearers . . . bless . . .” and then goes on to describe whom we would like God to bless. Often said on behalf of one who had an *aliyah* and for those who are sick.

Mincha: Afternoon prayer.

Mincha/Ma'ariv: Combination of Minha and Ma'ariv, which is often done, together, at around sundown.

Minor Prophets: An anthology of 12 prophetic books that appear at the end of “Nevi’im,” the “Prophets” section of the Bible. The designation “minor” refers to the size of the works, and not the importance of the particular prophet. The Minor Prophets are also known by the designation known as תרי עשר or שנים עשר the Hebrew and Aramic, respectively, for “twelve.”

Minyan: Quorum of 10 men required to recite certain prayers. In certain “liberal” forms of Judaism, women are quoted in a Minyan as well. Certain prayers may only be said when a Minyan is present.

Mishkan: Lit. “dwelling,” refers to the mobile sanctuary created in the Sinai wilderness, and used as the center of Jewish cult ritual until the building of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Mishle (Mishle): See Proverbs.

Mishnah: A compilation of rabbinic statements about Jewish law compiled in the late 2nd century by Rabbi Judah the Prince. Theories vary as to the purpose of the work - it is either a law code, a school book, or a bit of both. Together with the Gemara, which is a commentary on the Mishnah, it makes up the Talmud. These are main sources of Jewish law.

Mishneh Torah: Law code authored by Maimonides.

Mitzvah: Literally "commandment." This is used to refer to any action that is required by Jewish law. However, it is often used more generally as meaning "a good deed."

Mitzvat aseh shehazeman geramah (מצוות עשה שהזמן גורמה) See “Positive time bound mitzvah.” I.e. a *mitzvah* that imposes on us an obligation to do some action at some particular time.

Modim Derabanan: Variant on the 2nd to last blessing of the *Amidah* which is recited by the congregation as the *Chazzan* does the regular blessing in the repetition of the *Amidah*.

Mordechai: Hero of *Megillat Esther*. See: Megillat Esther.

Musaf: So named for the additional sacrifices done in the Temple in Jerusalem, *Musaf* refers to the prayer service that is added on the Sabbath, *Rosh Chodesh* and holidays.

Nahum: Seventh prophet anthologized in the “Minor Prophets.” Nothing is known about Nahum beyond that he is described in the opening verse of his book as “an Eshkolite.” The location of this town is unclear. He likely operated in the 7th century B.C.E.

Neilah: Fifth prayer service added at the end of Yom Kippur. Its name, נְאֵילָה, meaning “closing,” is a reference to the closing of “the gates of prayer,” so to speak.

Nevi'im: (נְבִיאִים, Prophets). Second of three major subdivisions of the Bible. It discusses the life and times of the Prophets in Israel. Nevi'im is often thought of as having two parts, *Nevi'im Rishonim*, or “Former Prophets” (the Books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) which are largely historical, and the *Nevi'im Acharonim*, or “Latter prophets,” which contain mostly the prophecies/speeches of the prophets.

Northern Kingdom: Kingdom created when the united Jewish kingdom split apart. It consisted of all the tribes except Judah and Benjamin. It is often referred to in the Bible as “Israel” or “Ephraim,” as juxtaposed against the Southern Kingdom’s “Judah.”

Numbers: The fourth book of the Torah. Known in Hebrew traditionally as חומש פקודים (*Chumash Pekudim*, The Scroll of Numbers) because of the two censes of the Israelites taken in the book, but now generally known as *Bamidbar* (“In the Wilderness”) after the fifth word in the book. This Book concentrates mostly on the continued trek of the Israelites through the Sinai wilderness towards Israel, and their conquest of Transjordan.

Oral Torah: AKA “*Torah shebe'al peh*.” A reference to rabbinic literature. So named because rabbinic literature was originally transmitted orally.

Ovadiah: (Usually “Obadiah” in English) Fourth prophet anthologized in the “Minor Prophets.” Little is known about Ovadiah, though his prophecy seems to indicate that he is speaking after the fall of the Beth Mikdahs in Jerusalem in 586.

Parshah: Section of the Torah read on Sabbaths. Throughout a 1 year period, the entirety of the Five books of Moses are read.

Pesukei D'zimrah: “Verses of Song.” A series of prayers, mostly Psalms, recited in the morning. Basically, they function as a warm up.

Positive time bound mitzvah: In Hebrew, **Mitzvat aseh shehazeman geramah** (מצוות עשה שהזמן גורמת), A *mitzvah* that imposes on us an obligation to do some action at some particular time. In general, women are exempt from the requirement of performing these commandments, though there are many exceptions to this rule.

Prophets: See Nevi'im.

Psalms (Tehillim): Biblical book (part of Ketuvim) consisting of prayers.

Proverbs (Mishle): Biblical book (part of Ketuvim) consisting of teachings of wisdom (proverbs).

Purim: Holiday celebrating the events in *Megillat Esther*, featuring the reading of *Megillat Esther*, giving charity to the poor, food to friends, and having a festive meal.

Rosh Chodesh: The beginning of a Jewish month. Sometimes, the last day of the previous month is also celebrated as *Rosh Chodesh*.

Samaria: Capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Saul: First King of Israel, eventually deposed by David, due to his failure to follow God's instructions.

Semichat ge'ulah letefillah: The idea that after the blessing regarding God as redeemer of Israel (ending בָּרוּךְ אֱלֹהִים הֵן כָּאֵל יְשָׁרָאֵל (Blessed are you God, redeemer of Israel)), one should not make any interruption before beginning the *Amidah*. As a historical note, it seems that originally the term *semichat ge'ulah letefillah* meant that one should finish reciting *Shema* in the morning just as the sun came over the horizon, and thus begin the *Amidah* exactly as the sun began to rise.

Septuagint: Greek word for 70, refers to the earliest Greek translation of the Bible, ca. 3rd century BCE. Extremely important for studies of the history of the Bible.

Shacharit: Morning prayer.

Shaliach Tsibur (Sha”Tz): AKA *chazzan* or by the acronym *sha”ts*. The cantor. This refers not necessarily to a professional cantor, but to whoever functions as the leader of the particular prayer service. The term *shaliach tsibur* means “the representative of the congregation.”

Shema: Three scriptural paragraphs that a Jewish adult male is required to recite every day.

Shemoneh Esreh: AKA “Amidah.” So named after the fact that the weekday *Amidah* originally had 18 blessings. Basic component of Jewish prayer. Each Jewish prayer service contains an *Amidah*.

Shemot: See Exodus.

Shof’tim: See Judges.

Shomron: See Samaria.

Shukel: Shaking during prayers. Some see this as a symbol of fervor, or trepidation at praying before God. Others see it as a release of nervous energy. There are those, this author included, who prefer not to shukel, as we are supposed to approach God with all the respect with which we would approach an earthly king (and more).

Samuel: Name of a prophet, also I and II Samuel are the third and fourth books of Nevi'im (Prophets). The main theme is the beginning of the reign of the Israelite kings.

Siddur: Jewish prayer book.

Solomon: King of Israel, son of King David. He built up the land of Israel, including building the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

Southern Kingdom: Kingdom created when the united Jewish kingdom split apart. It consisted of Judah and Benjamin and was lead by the Davidic Dynasty. It is often referred to as “Judah.”

Sukkot: Harvest festival in the autumn. The word Sukkah means “booth” and refers to the temporary huts in which we are supposed to live on Sukkot. This is meant to remind us of God’s protection as the Israelites traveled through the Sinai wilderness on their way from Egypt to Israel, and also that the Israelites lived in such huts on that trek. During the holiday, we also use a Lulav and Etrog. (see “Lulav and Etrog”)

Tachanun: “Supplication.” A series of extra prayers that are said after the *Shacharit* and *Mincha Amidah* on weekdays, except if the day is otherwise somehow important.

Tallit: Garment of four corners with fringes called *tsitsit*. The Bible requires that any garment with four corners to have *tsitsit*. Since most of modern clothing does not have four corners, the practice began to wear a special garment during prayers which would be obligated to have *tsitsit*.

Talmud: See Babylonian Talmud.

TaNa’Ch: Acronym referring to the three major subdivisions of the Bible. ת = *Ta* = *Torah* (the Five Books of Moses), נ = *Na* = נִבְיאִים = *Nevi'im* (Prophets), כ = *Ch* = כְּתֻבִים = *Ketuvim* (Writings).

Tefillah: Prayer.

Tefillin: Leather boxes containing certain portions of scripture which are worn on the arm and on the head.

Tehillim: See Psalms.

Torah: The term “Torah” literally means “teaching” or “instruction,” and can be used in one of many ways. Most classically, it refers to the Five Books of Moses (i.e. that which is in our Torah scroll,” which is the first of three major subdivisions of the Bible) It can also be used to refer to the entire Jewish Bible (i.e. including the Prophets and Writings). This is referred to as “The Written Torah” or “Torah *shebichtav*.” It can also be used to refer to include Rabbinic literature as well, known as “The Oral Torah” or “Torah *shebe'al peh*.”

Torah shebe’al peh: “The Oral Torah,” a reference to rabbinic literature. So named because rabbinic literature was originally transmitted orally.

Torah shebichtav: “The Written Torah,” a reference to the Jewish Bible, including the Five Books of Moses, the Prophets, and the Writings.

Twelve “Minor Prophets”: See “Minor Prophets.”

Tsitsit: See Tallit.

Vayikra: See Leviticus.

Written Torah: AKA “Torah *shebichtav*,” a reference to the Jewish Bible, including the Five Books of Moses, the Prophets, and the Writings.

Yahrzeit: The anniversary (on the Jewish calendar) of a person’s death.

Yehoshua: See Joshua.

Yibum: See Leverite marriage.

Yom Kippur: Jewish Day of Atonement. Often referred to as the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. It is also a fast day.

Zechariah: (English Zachariah) Eleventh prophet anthologized in the 12 minor prophets. His prophecies date to the time that Jews were returning to Israel from the Babylonian exile.

Zephania: Ninth prophet anthologized in the “Minor Prophets.” Prophecy in Jerusalem ca. 630-625 B.C.E.

Zion: Another name for Jerusalem, often used in more poetic writing. It also can refer in particular to the Temple mount.