

Stones and Stories #11

Shivat Zion and the Last Prophets

Gedaliah and the Remnant Who Stayed Behind

Jeremiah 40: So Jeremiah came to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah, and stayed with him among the people who were left in the land. The officers of the troops in the open country, and their men with them, heard that the king of Babylon had put Gedaliah son of Ahikam in charge of the region, and that he had put in his charge the men, women, and children—of the poorest in the land—those who had not been exiled to Babylon. So they with their men came to Gedaliah at Mizpah—Ishmael son of Nethaniah; Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah; Seraiah son of Tanhumeth; the sons of Ephai the Netophathite; and Jezaniah son of the Maacathite. Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan reassured them and their men, saying, “Do not be afraid to serve the Chaldeans. Stay in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will go well with you. I am going to stay in Mizpah to attend upon the Chaldeans who will come to us. But you may gather wine and figs and oil and put them in your own vessels, and settle in the towns you have occupied.” Likewise, all the Judeans who were in Moab, Ammon, and Edom, or who were in other lands, heard that the king of Babylon had let a remnant stay in Judah, and that he had put Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan in charge of them. All these Judeans returned from all the places to which they had scattered. They came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah, and they gathered large quantities of wine and figs.

Treachery and More Exile

Jeremiah 41: In the seventh month, Ishmael son of Nethaniah son of Elishama, who was of royal descent and one of the king’s commanders, came with ten men to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah; and they ate together there at Mizpah. Then Ishmael son of Nethaniah and the ten men who were with him arose and struck down Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan with the sword and killed him, because the king of Babylon had put him in charge of the land. Ishmael also killed all the Judeans who were with him—with Gedaliah in Mizpah—and the Chaldean soldiers who were stationed there. The second day after Gedaliah was killed, when no one yet knew about it, eighty men came from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria, their beards shaved, their garments torn, and their bodies gashed, carrying meal offerings and frankincense to present at the House of the LORD. Ishmael son of Nethaniah went out from Mizpah to meet them, weeping as he walked. As he met them, he said to them, “Come to Gedaliah son of Ahikam.”

When they came inside the town, Ishmael son of Nethaniah and the men who were with him slaughtered them [and threw their bodies] into a cistern. . . .

Ishmael carried off all the rest of the people who were in Mizpah, including the daughters of the king—all the people left in Mizpah, over whom Nebuzaradan, the chief of the guards, had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam. Ishmael son of Nethaniah carried them off, and set out to cross over to the Ammonites. Johanan son of Kareah, and all the army officers with him, heard of all the crimes committed by Ishmael son of Nethaniah. They took all their men and went to fight against Ishmael son of Nethaniah; and they encountered him by the great pool in Gibeon.

Remembering Zion

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, sat and wept, as we remembered Zion.

There on the poplars we hung up our lyres,

for our captors asked us there for songs, our tormentors, for amusement, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion.”

How can we sing a song of the LORD on alien soil?

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither;

let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of you, if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory even at my happiest hour. (Psalms 137)

The Return

“In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, when the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah was fulfilled, the LORD roused the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia to issue a proclamation throughout his realm by word of mouth and in writing as follows: “Thus said King Cyrus of Persia: The LORD God of Heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has charged me with building Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Anyone of you of all His people—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem that is in Judah and build the House of the LORD God of Israel, the God that is in Jerusalem; and all who stay behind, wherever he may be living, let the people of his place assist him with silver, gold, goods, and livestock, besides the freewill offering to the House of God that is in Jerusalem.” So the chiefs of the clans of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites, all whose spirit had been roused by God, got ready to go up to build the House of the LORD that is in Jerusalem.” (Ezra 1:1-5)

Shivat Zion Timeline

Date	Foreign King	Prophet/Jewish Leader	Event
586 BCE	Nebudchanezzar, Babylonia (605 – 562)	Jeremiah, Tzidkiyahu	Destruction of First Temple, Exile to Babylonia
539	Cyrus the Great, Persia (559 – 529)	Sheshbazzar, Prince of Judah	Cyrus conquers Babylonian Empire, allows Jews to return to Israel with Temple vessels
538	Cyrus the Great	Zerubbabel ben Shaltiel, Yehua ben Yehozadak the priest	Foundations of Second Temple laid, work stopped
520	Darius the First (522-486)	Chaggai, Zechariah, Zerubbabel, Yeshua	Work renewed on Temple
516	Darius the First	Chaggai, Zechariah, Zerubbabel, Yeshua	Dedication of Second Temple, celebration of Passover
ca. 480	Xerxes (Ahashverosh) (486 – 465)	Mordechai, Esther, Malachi (?)	Purim story
458	Artaxerxes (Artachshastah) (465 – 425)	Ezra	Aliyah of Ezra the Scribe, intermarriage reform
445	Artaxerxes	Nehemiah, Ezra	Aliyah of Nehemiah, rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, Rosh Hashana reform and covenant
333	Alexander the Great, Macedonia	Shimon HaTzaddik, Men of the Great Assembly	Alexander conquers much of the Persian Empire, including Eretz Yisrael

Where is the Province of Yahud?

Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate; they rebuilt it and set up its doors, locks, and bars. And [they also repaired] a thousand cubits of wall to the Dung Gate. Malchijah son of Rechab, chief of the district of Beth-hakerem, repaired the Dung Gate; he rebuilt it and set up its doors, locks, and bars. Shallun son of Col-hozeh, chief of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate; he rebuilt it and covered it, and set up its doors, locks, and bars, as well as the wall of the irrigation pool of the King's Garden as far as the steps going down from the City of David. (Nehemiah 3:13-15)

What Do the Prophets Say? Haggai

And the word of the LORD through the prophet Haggai continued: Is it a time for you to dwell in your paneled houses, while this House is lying in ruins? Now thus said the LORD of Hosts: Consider how you have been faring! You have sowed much and brought in little; you eat without being satisfied; you drink without getting your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one gets warm; and he who earns anything earns it for a leaky purse. Thus said the LORD of Hosts: Consider how you have fared: Go up to the hills and get timber, and rebuild the House; then I will look on it with favor and I will be glorified^c—said the LORD. You have been expecting much and getting little; and when you brought it home, I would blow on it! Because of what?—says the LORD of Hosts. Because of My House which lies in ruins, while you all hurry to your own houses! That is why the skies above you have withheld [their] moisture and the earth has withheld its yield (Haggai 1:3-10)

What Do the Prophets Say? Zechariah

Lo, a day of the LORD is coming when your spoil shall be divided in your very midst! For I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem for war: The city shall be captured, the houses plundered, and the women violated; and a part of the city shall go into exile. But the rest of the population shall not be uprooted from the city. Then the LORD will come forth and make war on those nations as He is wont to make war on a day of battle. On that day, He will set His feet on the Mount of Olives, near Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall split across from east to west, and one part of the Mount shall shift to the north and the other to the south, a huge gorge. And the Valley in the Hills shall be stopped up, for the Valley of the Hills shall reach only to Azal; it shall be stopped up as it was stopped up as a result of the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah.—And the LORD my God, with all the holy beings, will come to you. (Zechariah 14:1-5)

“In that day, fresh water shall flow from Jerusalem, part of it to the Eastern and part to the Western Sea, throughout the summer and winter.” (Zechariah 14:8)

Zechariah and the Symbol of Israel

“The angel who talked with me came back and woke me as a man is wakened from sleep. He said to me, “What do you see?” And I answered, “I see a menorah all of gold, with a bowl above it. The lamps on it are seven in number, and seven lamps above it have seven pipes; and by it are two olive trees, one on the right of the bowl and one on its left.” I, in turn, asked the angel who talked with me, “What do those things mean, my lord?” “Do you not know what those things mean?” asked the angel who talked with me; and I said, “No, my lord.” Then he explained to me as follows: “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit.—said the LORD of Hosts.’ (Zechariah 4:1-6)

Zechariah and the Future

“Thus said the LORD of Hosts: There shall yet be old men and women in the squares of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. And the squares of the city shall be crowded with boys and girls playing in the squares.” (Zechariah 8:4-5)

What Do the Prophets Say? Malachi

“A son should honor his father, and a slave his master. Now if I am a father, where is the honor due Me? And if I am a master, where is the reverence due Me?—said the LORD of Hosts to you, O priests who scorn My name. But you ask, “How have we scorned Your name?” You offer defiled food on My altar. But you ask, “How have we defiled You?” By saying, “The table of the LORD can be treated with scorn.” When you present a blind animal for sacrifice—it doesn’t matter! When you present a lame or sick one—it doesn’t matter! Just offer it to your governor: Will he accept you? Will he show you favor?—said the LORD of Hosts.” (Malachi 1:6-8)

Malachi and Elijah

“Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the coming of the awesome, fearful day of the LORD. He shall reconcile parents with children and children with their parents, so that, when I come, I do not strike the whole land with utter destruction.” (Malachi 3:23-24)

Nehemiah’s Challenges

“I arrived in Jerusalem. After I was there three days I got up at night, I and a few men with me, and telling no one what my God had put into my mind to do for Jerusalem, and taking no other beast than the one on which I was riding, I went out by the Valley Gate, at night, toward the Jackals’ Spring and the Dung Gate;

and I surveyed the walls of Jerusalem that were breached, and its gates, consumed by fire. I proceeded to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, where there was no room for the beast under me to continue. So I went up the wadi by night, surveying the wall, and, entering again by the Valley Gate, I returned." (Nehemiah 2:11-15)

Intermarriage and Samaritans

"While Ezra was praying and making confession, weeping and prostrating himself before the House of God, a very great crowd of Israelites gathered about him, men, women, and children; the people were weeping bitterly. Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel of the family of Elam spoke up and said to Ezra, "We have trespassed against our God by bringing into our homes foreign women from the peoples of the land; ^aOr "*Is there...?*" but there is still hope for Israel despite this.^a Now then, let us make a covenant with our God to expel all these women and those who have been born to them, in accordance with the bidding of the Lord and of all who are concerned over the commandment of our God, and let the Teaching be obeyed. Take action, for the responsibility is yours and we are with you. Act with resolve!" So Ezra at once put the officers of the priests and the Levites and all Israel under oath to act accordingly, and they took the oath." (Ezra 10:1-5)

"One of the sons of Joiada son of the high priest Eliashib was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; I drove him away from me." (Nehemiah 13:28)

Trade on Shabbat

"I saw men in Judah treading winepresses on the sabbath, and others bringing heaps of grain and loading them onto asses, also wine, grapes, figs, and all sorts of goods, and bringing them into Jerusalem on the sabbath. I admonished them there and then for selling provisions. Tyrians who lived there brought fish and all sorts of wares and sold them on the sabbath to the Judahites in Jerusalem. I censured the nobles of Judah, saying to them, "What evil thing is this that you are doing, profaning the sabbath day! This is just what your ancestors did, and for it God brought all this misfortune on this city; and now you give cause for further wrath against Israel by profaning the sabbath!" When shadows filled the gateways of Jerusalem at the approach of the sabbath, I gave orders that the doors be closed, and ordered them not to be opened until after the sabbath. I stationed some of my servants at the gates, so that no goods should enter on the sabbath. Once or twice the merchants and the vendors of all sorts of wares spent the night outside Jerusalem, but I warned them, saying, "What do you mean by spending the night alongside the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands upon you!" From then on they did not come on the sabbath" (Nehemiah 13:15-21)

Ezra's Innovations: Writing

Mar Zutra says, and some say that it is Mar Ukva who says: Initially, the Torah was given to the Jewish people in *Ivrit* script, the original form of the written language, and the sacred tongue, Hebrew. It was given to them again in the days of Ezra in *Ashurit* script and the Aramaic tongue. (Sanhedrin 21b)

Torah Reading

“the entire people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the scroll of the Teaching of Moses with which the LORD had charged Israel. On the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the Teaching before the congregation, men and women and all who could listen with understanding. He read from it, facing the square before the Water Gate, from the first light until midday, to the men and the women and those who could understand; the ears of all the people were given to the scroll of the Teaching.” (Nehemiah 8:1-3)

The Sages taught that Ezra the Scribe instituted ten ordinances: He instituted that communities read the Torah on Shabbat in the afternoon; and they also read the Torah on every Monday and Thursday; and the courts convene and judge every Monday and Thursday; and one does laundry on Thursday; and one eats garlic on Shabbat eve. . . (Bava Kama 82a)