

מִשְׁפָּטִים

Jeremiah, chapter 34, verses 8 to 22 and chapter 33, verses 25 and 26

Introduction

Connection of haftarah and sidra:

The weekly portion opens with rules about the release of Hebrew slaves; the haftarah reports how, in Jeremiah's time, the ruling classes of Judah reversed their previous release of Jewish slaves, and how the Prophet dealt with this reversal.

The setting:

In the year 589 B.C.E. the Babylonians, under King Nebuchadnezzar, invaded Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem. Its Jewish elite agreed to a wholesale release of Hebrew slaves, in order to induce God's forgiveness (the slaves should have been released long ago; see below). But when, in 588, the siege was suddenly lifted, the former owners canceled the release and returned the slaves to their previous status. Jeremiah severely condemns this perfidious act and predicts the direst consequences.

For more on Jeremiah and his time, see our *General Introduction*.

The message:

1. The historical stage is set. It is told in the objective-biographical form that characterizes much of the book. (34:8-11)
2. The Prophet's reaction to the perfidy: speaking in God's name, he predicts that the Babylonians will return and take up the siege, conquer Jerusalem, and burn it down. (12-22)
3. The haftarah concludes with an encouraging message, with two verses added from the preceding chapter of the book. (33:25-26)