

From this Shabbat until Shabbat Shuva, the weekly Haftarot relate to the Jewish calendar instead of the weekly Parashah. The first three of these Haftarot are the **Three of Affliction (Aramaic: תלת דפערענותא)**, describing the destruction of Judah, Jerusalem, and the First Temple in 587 BCE. They are recited on consecutive Shabbatot of the “Three Weeks”, between the fasts of the 17th of Tammuz and Tisha B’Av. In most years, when Parashiot Mattot and Masei are read on a single Shabbat, the first such Haftarah is recited with Parashat Pinchas; in years when those parashiot are read on two Shabbatot, it is recited with Parashat Mattot¹.

Three of Affliction #1 (Pinchas or Mattot): Jeremiah 1:1-2:3

Amid social and political upheaval in Judah and beyond, God summons the young Jeremiah to be a prophet in 626 BCE. The Assyrian Empire weakens to the north, with uncertain consequences for Judah. Generations of idolatry have thoroughly corrupted Judean society, Jerusalem, the Temple, and its divine service. Jeremiah’s prophetic predecessors have had only temporary successes in returning the Northern Kingdom (exiled a century earlier), Judah, and their leaders to God. Josiah, the reigning king of Judah is beginning to steer a more righteous course.

In the Haftarah, Jeremiah’s inaugural prophecy, God forces him to accept His nearly impossible assignment. God designated him as a prophet to Judah and the nations even before his mother conceived him. His primary task is to convince Judah to return to God lest He send northern nations to destroy them. The mission will be difficult; Jeremiah fears those who will attack him, just as they attacked earlier prophets. God, therefore, promises to strengthen and protect him- but if Jeremiah loses courage, God will allow them to destroy him. Jeremiah replies that his inability to speak should delay his mission. God responds by placing His word in his mouth so he can speak, and by showing that Jeremiah already has great prophetic ability. Moreover, delay is not possible as God is hurrying to bring northern nations to punish and destroy Judah for its sins. The Haftarah concludes on several positive notes. Jeremiah must remind Judah of their loyalty to Him after the Exodus, of Israel’s holiness as the first “harvest” among God’s “crop” of nations, and of His promise to destroy those who violate their sanctity by devouring them.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 1:1-3: From a priestly family living near Jerusalem, Jeremiah begins to prophesy in 626 BCE, the 13th year of Josiah’s reign. He prophesied until Jerusalem’s destruction in Av, 586 BCE.

Jeremiah 1:1	ירמיהו א:א
The words of Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah, [one] of the priests [living in] Anathoth, in the land of Benjamin.	דָבְרֵי יְרַמִּיהו בֶן־חַלְקַיָּהו מִזְהָכְרָנִים אֲשֶׁר בָּעֲנָתֹות בָּאָרֶץ בְּנֵי־יִהּוָה:

Verses 1:4-10: God tells Jeremiah that He appointed him, before his birth, as a prophet to all nations. Jeremiah replies that he is unfit since he cannot speak. God rejects this, insisting that he follow His command without fear since He will protect him from those who will oppose him. God places His word in his mouth so he can speak.

Jeremiah 1:10	ירמיהו א:ז
See, today I have appointed you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, to pull down, to destroy, and to throw down; to build and to plant.	רְאֵה הַפְּקֻדָּתִךְ קָיֹם כִּי־הָעָלָה־גּוֹיִם וְעַל־הַמְּלָכִים לְגַזֵּעַ וְלְגַזְעָן וְלְאַבְיוֹן וְלְאַבְיוֹן לְבָנָוֹת וְלְבָנָוֹת: {פ}

¹ In such years, when Parashat Pinchas is read before the 17th of Tammuz, its Haftarah is 1 Kings 18:46-19:21.

Verses 1:11-12: God shows Jeremiah he can prophetically see an almond tree branch. Praising Jeremiah's prophetic vision, God tells him that it symbolizes His speed in carrying out His word.

Jeremiah 1:11	ירמיהו א:י"א
The Lord's word came to me, saying, "What do you see, Jeremiah?" I said, "I see a rod of an almond tree."	וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֲלֵי לֵאמֹר מִהָּעֵד רָאָה יְרֻמְיהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר מִקֶּדֶשׁ שְׁקָד אָנָי רָאָה:

Verses 1:13-16: God shows Jeremiah a vision of a boiling pot in the north. It symbolizes that God is bringing all the nations from the north, led by their kings, to punish Judah and Jerusalem for abandoning Him to serve idols.

Jeremiah 1:15	ירמיהו א:ט"ו
"For, behold Me [as I] summon all the northern kingdoms' families," says the Lord. "They will come and place, each one, his throne at the entrance of Jerusalem's gates, against all its walls around, and against all Judah's cities."	כִּי אָנֹכִי קֹרֵא לְכָל-מִשְׁפָחוֹת מִמְּלֹכּוֹת אֲצֹפָה בְּאַמִּיה' וְאָנוּ גָּנְגָנְתָנוּ אִישׁ כָּסָא פִּתְחָה שְׁעָרִי יְרוּשָׁלָם וְעַל כָּל-חוֹמָתֵךְ סְבִיב וְעַל כָּל-עַרְיוֹן יְהִינָּה:

Verses 1:17-19: Jeremiah must stand strong while delivering God's words to Judah and its entire leadership; God will protect him as they battle against him. If Jeremiah is weak, God will ensure that his enemies destroy him.

Jeremiah 1:18	ירמיהו א:י"ח
I [God], behold I have made you today into a fortified city, an iron pillar, and copper walls against the entire land- against Judah's kings, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land.	וְאַנְּכִי הַבָּה נְמַתְּקִיךְ הַיּוֹם לְעִיר מְבָץ וּלְעַמּוֹד בְּרוּל וּלְחַמּוֹת נְחַשָּׁת עַל-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ לְמִלְכֵי יְהוּדָה לְשָׂלִיחַ לְכָבֵדָה וּלְעַם הָאָרֶץ:

Verses 2:1-3: Jeremiah must tell Jerusalem that God remembers Israel's youthful loyalty to Him in the wilderness after the Exodus. Israel is God's "first crop" among the nations, so He will punish those who consume them.

Jeremiah 2:2	ירמיהו ב:ב
[Jeremiah,] go and call out into Jerusalem's ears saying, "So said the Lord, 'I remember for you the kindness of your youth, your love as [My] bride, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in an unsown land.' "	הַלְךָ תְּקַרְאֵת בְּאֹזְנֵי יְרוּשָׁלָם לְאָמֵר כֹּה אָמַר יְהָוָה זְכַרְתִּי לְךָ תְּסַדֵּךְ נְעוֹרָךְ אֶחֱבָת כְּלֹילָתִיךְ לְקַדְךְ אֶחָרִי בַּמְדָבֵר בְּאָרֶץ לֹא זָרֹועָה:

Connection

The Talmud asserts that the **almond branch** Jeremiah saw symbolizes the **Three Weeks** between the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av.

Jerusalem Talmud Taanit 23a	תלמוד ירושלמי תענית כ"ג א
[There are] 21 days from when [Jerusalem] was breached [on the 17th of Tammuz] until the day of the Temple's destruction [on the 9th of Av]. Rav Avunah said, "A sign [for these 21 days] is, 'I see a rod of an almond tree' (Jer. 1:11): Just as an almond tree puts forth blossoms and produces its fruit 21 days later, so too there were 21 days from when [Jerusalem] was breached until the day the Temple was destroyed."	כ"א ימים שהובקעה העיר ועד יום שחרר בhem"ק. א"ר אבונה סימנא (ירמיהו א) מקל שקד אני רואה מה הללו זהה שהוא מוציא את ニצו ועד שהוא אומר את פירוטו כ"א יום כך ימים שהובקעה העיר ועד יום שחרר הבית כ"א ימים.