

HAFTORAH SUMMARY FOR PARSHAS BEHAR

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

This week's Haftorah relates one of the most tragic yet uplifting episodes in the life of Yirmiyahu and the history of the destruction of the 1st Bais Hamikdash. Yirmiyahu, the prophet of doom, began his prophecies 40 years before the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash in 3298; 463 b.c.e. One year before the actual destruction, Yirmiyahu was imprisoned for a second time on charges of treason. However, he continued to proclaim the eventual destruction of Yerushalayim and the exile of the nation from Israel.

G-d sent Yirmiyahu a message while he was in prison that he was to redeem the ancestral field of his uncle Chanamael the son of Shalum. (That is the direct connection to Parshas Bhar.) Yirmiyahu purchased the field and gave the deed of purchase to his student Baruch ben Nuriah (who would succeed Yirmiyahu as spiritual leader of the nation) to be secured in a sealed clay vessel for safekeeping.

G-d's message to the Yirmiyahu and the Jews was direct and simple. Repentance is yet possible. "Houses, fields, and vineyards will yet be bought in this land. (32:15)

Imagine! On the eve of the First Temple's destruction, while imprisoned on charges of treason for demoralizing the nation with his incessant message of impending doom and destruction, Jeremiah was commanded to act out a charade of optimism and hope. Yirmiyahu himself questioned G-d's message. (32:25) Why should I do this? The city has been handed over to the Chaldeans!. G-d answered, (32:27) Behold! I am G-d. Is anything to wondrous for Me to do?

Although Yirmiyahu had futilely prophesized the destruction of the land for 40 years, there was still a chance for the Jews to reverse the decree. However, more than the ever-present possibility of repentance and redemption was the message of hope. No matter how dismal the times or seemingly inevitable the doom, we must have hope. Even the great Yirmiyahu needed to be reminded to have hope.

In the end, on the day of the actual destruction of the Temple, Yirmiyahu was not in Yerushalayim. The Medresh relates that upon turning toward his beloved Yerushalayim, Yirmiyahu saw smoke rising from the Temple Mt. Instead of suspecting the worst, Yirmiyahu allowed himself to hope, as G-d had taught him, that the smoke was from sacrifices that the Jews had finally decided to offer on the Temple altar. He allowed himself to hope that the nation had repented and the disaster would be averted. Unfortunately, it was not so.