

unto all the people saying: . . . He that remaineth in the city shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence (Jer. 38:1-2). Thereupon they came to the king Zedekiah and said to him: "This man prophesies much evil concerning us. He does not have in mind the welfare of this place." The king replied: "Behold, he is in your hand; do to him what seems good to you." They then took Jeremiah and cast him into a pit which belonged to Malchiah the king's son, a pit full of water. But the Holy One, blessed be He, performed miracles for Jeremiah: first the water sank to the bottom,²⁰ and then the mud came up to the top so that Jeremiah stood stuck in the mud. And Jonathan the scribe, reviling and taunting Jeremiah, kept saying: "Put your head down in the mud—maybe you will have a good nap."

Now when Ebed-Melech the Cushite heard (Jer. 38:7). Ebed-Melech was one of four personages who were called Cushites: Zipporah, Israel, Saul,²¹ and Ebed-Melech. And why was he called Cushite? Even as a Cushite stands out because of [the color of] his skin, so in the palaces of Zedekiah Ebed-Melech stood out because of his good deeds.

He came to Zedekiah and said: Know that if Jeremiah dies in the pit, the city will be given over to our foes. Zedekiah answered: Then take thirty²² men with you and bring up Jeremiah out of the pit. See what a severe affliction famine is! Even thirty men together did not have the strength to bring up Jeremiah from the pit,²³ but finally, with great difficulty, they succeeded in bringing him up. [To begin getting him out of the pit], Ebed-Melech the Cushite had come into the king's house and thence had taken worn cloths and worn rags. He had gone and stood at the pit and had cried out saying: "My lord Jeremiah, my lord Jeremiah!" There had been no voice and no answer, and so he had put his hands on his garments and rent them, and had gone forth weeping. Actually Jeremiah had heard him, but he was afraid that it

20. Reading *And in the pit [where there had been water] the water was no more* (Jer. 38:6). Generally a pit (*beer*), which in Hebrew is close to *br*, "well," has water. JV: *And in the pit there was no water*.

21. See Num. 12:1; Amos 9:7; Ps. 7:1; and MTeh 7:14 and 18.

22. "thirty," as in Parma MS, W, and Jer. 38:11; P and FT: "three."

23. "See what a severe . . . Jeremiah from the pit"—Parma MS.

was Jonathan the scribe [who was calling]. When Jeremiah heard a voice weeping, however, he had asked: "Who is he that calls me and weeps?" The reply had been: "It is Ebed-Melech the Cushite. By your life, I thought you were dead. Here is a rope. Put it against the rags under your armpits." And so they took Jeremiah up out of the pit.

6. So Jeremiah continued to abide in the court of the guard (Jer. 38:28) at the time that Nebuchadnezzar was striking camp and preparing to go forth against Jerusalem.²⁴ When he reached Riblah he delayed there, because he was afraid lest what had befallen Sennacherib should befall him. Then he summoned Nebuzaradan and made him chief over all his hosts and said to him: "Go conquer Jerusalem." Nebuzaradan went and laid siege to Jerusalem from the ninth year of the reign of Zedekiah until the eleventh year of his reign.²⁵ The host of Nebuchadnezzar could not conquer Jerusalem, however, because God's decree against Zion and against Jerusalem had not yet been sealed. But then the time came, the time set for Zion and for Jerusalem to be destroyed—such times are set for all the children of man, indeed a time of destruction is set for everything that exists.²⁶ Hence [in Israel's history], on the seventeenth day of Tammuz, five punishments befell Israel: The Tablets were broken at the foot of Mount Sinai, the daily offering in the Temple ceased, the city of Jerusalem was breached, Apostomos burned the Torah, and he set up an idol in the Temple.²⁷ But the time set for the Temple to be burned down was the Ninth Day of Ab.²⁸

24. [Perhaps rather "was gathering his armies, which thereupon marched upon Jerusalem." L. N.]

25. See 2 Kings 25:1-2.

26. The words "such times are set for all the children of man, indeed a time of destruction is set for everything that exists" follow Parma MS. PE are obscure. Cf. *A time set a time [of destruction] that is to come upon the four corners of the Land* (Ezek. 7:1).

27. See Ta 4:6, and Alon, *Toledot*, I, 259, who identifies Apostomos as an officer during the revolt against Trajan in 116-17. See also "Apostomus," JE, 2, 21.

28. On this day it was decreed that the generation of the exodus should not enter the Holy Land, that the First and the Second Temples be destroyed, that Bethar be taken, and that the city of Jerusalem be plowed under. See B.Ta 26b.

The famine was sore in the city (Jer. 52:6). The well-born daughters of Zion used to walk around and around²⁹ in the streets of the city, staring at each other, until at last one would say to her friend: "Why have you come out into the street? Has a woman like you ever before walked the streets like a whore?"³⁰ And the other would reply, saying: "What have I to hide from you? The 'boon'³¹ of famine is hard to accept. I cannot bear it." Then, supporting one another, the daughters of Zion walked around looking for food in the city, for something to put into their mouths.³² And not finding anything to eat, they clutched at the house pillars, and whenever the street turned, fell dead at the base of the pillars. Now their infants who still sucked their mothers' milk came crawling after them upon their hands and feet. Each child, recognizing his own mother, came up, took the breast he knew, and put it against his mouth, expecting to draw milk. But he drew none, and so, driven into a frenzy, he died in his mother's bosom; thus was fulfilled the text *When their life is poured out into their mother's bosom* (Lam. 2:12).

In that time the Lord said to Jeremiah: "Rise, go to Anathoth and buy the field from thine uncle Hanamel." Thereupon Jeremiah thought in his heart: Maybe God means to turn Jerusalem over to its inhabitants³³ and allow them to carry on their living as usual within it. Hence, [to assure them of His intention], the Lord says to me: Go, buy the field for thyself.

As soon as Jeremiah left Jerusalem, the angel of the Lord came down from heaven, set his feet against the walls of Jerusalem, and breached them. Then the angel cried out, saying: Let the enemies come and enter the House, for the Master of the House is no longer within. Let them despoil and destroy it. Let them go into the vineyard and cut down the vines, for the Watchman has gone

29. "used to walk around and around"—so Parma MS; PE: "were joined in."

30. "Has a woman like you ever before walked the streets like a whore?"—so Parma MS; PE: "You who have never gone forth into the street."

31. "boon"—so Parma MS; PE: "smiting."

32. "for food" and "for something to put into their mouths" added, as in Parma MS.

33. "to its inhabitants"—Parma MS.

away and left it. And to the enemies he said: Do not boast that ye have vanquished the city. Nay, a conquered city ye have conquered, a dead people ye have killed.

The enemies came and set up a platform for themselves upon the Temple Mount. Then they went up to this platform, which was centrally located at the very spot where Solomon used to sit when he took counsel with the elders. There at the very spot where the embellishment of the Temple had been planned by Solomon and the elders, there the enemies sat and planned the burning of the Temple. As they were deliberating, they lifted their eyes and saw four angels descending, in their hands four flaming torches which they placed at the four corners of the Temple, setting it on fire.³⁴

When the High Priest saw that the Temple was on fire, he took the keys and cast them heavenward. He opened his mouth and cried out: "Here are the keys of Thy House; I have been an unworthy custodian of it." He started to go, but the enemies seized him and slaughtered him at the altar in the very place where he used to offer the daily sacrifice. His daughter ran out wildly, crying: "Woe unto me! My father, the delight of my eyes!" They seized her and slaughtered her also and mingled her blood with the blood of her father.

When the priests and the Levites saw that the Temple was on fire, they took their harps and trumpets and let themselves fall with them into the flames and were consumed. When the virgins who wove the curtain for the Sanctuary saw that the Temple was on fire, they let themselves fall into the flames, so that the enemies should not violate them, and were consumed.

When Zedekiah saw all that was happening, he sought to flee through an underground passage used as³⁵ a watermain, that led to Jericho. Since he was weary, his sons were walking well ahead of him. Nebuzaradan espied Zedekiah, seized him, and then seized his ten sons. Nebuzaradan sent all of them to Nebuchadnezzar, who asked: "Tell me, Zedekiah,³⁶ what made you rebel

34. Cf. Lam. 1:13, and see Piskas 31:1 and 33:1.

35. "used as"—Parma MS; PE apparently read "alongside."

36. "Tell me, Zedekiah"—Parma MS; PE: "Say to Zedekiah."

against me? By what law shall I judge you? If by the law of your God, you deserve the death penalty, for you swore in His name falsely; if by the laws of the state, you deserve the death penalty, for he who violates his oath to the king deserves the death penalty."

Thereupon Zedekiah replied: "I beg you³⁷, slay me first so that I may not see the blood of my sons." And his sons pleaded, saying: "Slay us first so that we may not see the blood of our father shed upon the earth."

And so Nebuchadnezzar did what they asked: he slaughtered them before Zedekiah. Then he gouged out Zedekiah's eyes, put him in an oven of brass,³⁸ and took him to Babylon. And Zedekiah kept crying out, Come and see, all you children of men, that Jeremiah prophesied truly about me when he said to me: You will go to Babylon and in Babylon you will die, but your eyes will not have seen Babylon. I would not listen to his words. And here I am in Babylon, and my eyes do not see it.

In the meantime, the prophet Jeremiah left Anathoth to come back to Jerusalem. He lifted his eyes and saw the smoke of the Temple rising up. So he said in his heart: Maybe Israel has returned in penitence to bring offerings, and now the smoke of incense is rising up. But when he climbed closer and stood upon the wall, he saw the Temple overturned into heap upon heap of stones and the wall of Jerusalem broken down.³⁹ Thereupon he cried out to God, saying: *Thou hast enticed me, and I was enticed; Thou hast overcome me, and hast prevailed*,⁴⁰ etc. (Jer. 20:7). As he continued on his way, he kept crying out, saying: "What road have the sinners taken? What road have those taken who are going off to exile?"⁴¹ What road have those taken who

37. "I beg you"—Parma MS.

38. "of brass"—Parma MS. Louis Ginzberg emends the text to read "in a cage [to be displayed]." See his *Legends*, 6, 382, and PRKB, 138a, where it is said that the cherubim were put in a cage to be displayed.

39. Parma MS and probably P: *mšwgt*, "destroyed," and not *mšwgt*, "closed up" or "shut in."

40. By the command to go to Anathoth.

41. "What road have those taken who are going off to exile?"—Parma MS.

are about to perish? I will go and perish with them." As he went, he saw the road covered with blood, and the ground on both sides soaked with the blood of the slain.⁴² He put his face close to the ground and saw the footprints of sucklings and infants who were walking into captivity. He threw himself upon the ground and kissed the footprints. When he caught up with the host going into captivity, he embraced them and kissed them. He wept with them, and they with him. He then spoke and said: My brethren and my people, all that has befallen you is the consequence of your not hearkening to the words of the prophecy that God uttered through me.

When Jeremiah reached the river Euphrates, Nebuzaradan spoke, saying to him: *If it seem good unto thee to come with me into Babylon, come* (Jer. 40:4). So Jeremiah thought in his heart: If I go with the exiles to Babylon, there will be no comforter for the captivity left in Jerusalem. Thereupon he started to go forth from among them. When the exiles lifted their eyes and saw that Jeremiah was taking leave of them, all of them broke out weeping with loud lamentation and cried out, saying: "Our father Jeremiah, in truth, will you abandon us?" There they sat down and⁴³ wept, for thus it is written *By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept* (Ps. 137:1). Jeremiah answered and said: "I call heaven and earth to witness that if you had wept even once while you dwelt in Zion, you would not have been driven out." Jeremiah, weeping as he walked, said: "Alas for thee, Zion, most precious of cities!"

7. Jeremiah said: [After I left the exiles] and was going back up to Jerusalem I lifted my eyes and saw at the top of a mountain a woman seated, clothed in black, her hair disheveled, crying and pleading for someone to comfort her. And I was crying and pleading: "Who will comfort me?" I came near her and spoke to her, saying: "If thou art a woman, speak to me, but if thou art a spirit, depart from me." She answered me, saying: "Do you not

42. "the slain"—Parma MS; PE: "its slain."

43. "sat down and"—Parma MS.

recognize me? I am the woman who had seven sons. Their father went away to a far city by the sea. Then a messenger came and said to me: 'Your husband has died in the city by the sea.'⁴⁴ As I was going up to lament him, behold a second messenger⁴⁵ came and said: 'Your house has fallen on your seven sons and slain them.' And in my distraction I know not for whom I am to cry or for whom I am to disarray my hair." I replied, saying: "You are not more deserving of comfort than Mother Zion who has been made into a pasture for the beasts of the field." She replied, saying: "I am thy Mother Zion, the mother of seven, as Scripture says: *She that hath borne seven languisheth*" (Jer. 15:9). Jeremiah said: Thy chastisement is like Job's chastisement. His sons and daughters were taken from Job, and thy sons and daughters have been taken from thee. His gold and silver were taken⁴⁶ from Job, and thy gold and thy silver have been taken from thee. Job was cast upon a dunghheap, and thou hast been turned into a heap of dung. But even as God turned back and comforted Job, so will He turn back and comfort thee. The number of his sons and his daughters was doubled for Job, and the number of thy sons and thy daughters will be doubled for thee. His silver and his gold were doubled for Job, and the same thing will be done for thee. Job finally shook the dung from his person; and to thee it will be said *Shake thyself from the dust; arise and sit down, O Jerusalem* (Isa. 52:2). Flesh-and-blood built thee; flesh-and-blood destroyed thee. But in the time-to-come, [says the Lord], I will rebuild thee. Thus it is written *The Lord doth build up Jerusalem, He gathereth together the dispersed of Israel* (Ps. 147:2). Amen. Soon, and in our own days, may the Holy One, blessed be He, fulfill the verse that says of us: *And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion*, etc. (Jer. 35:10).

⁴⁴ "Then a messenger came . . . in the city by the sea"—Parma MS.

⁴⁵ "a second messenger" added, as in Parma MS. In PE the words *iny b'*, "a second [messenger] came," were conflated to read "who prophesied."

⁴⁶ "were taken," as in Parma MS; PE read here and in the following lines: "I took," "I cast," "I came back," "I doubled."

PISKA 27

SUMMARY

The consequences of disobedience to God's words

During two years the Land of Israel produced crops in such abundance as it had not produced in all the previous years of the world's existence. One of these crops was produced in the year before the children of Israel were supposed to come into the Land. The second extraordinary crop was produced in the year that the children of Israel were banished from the Land. But the children of Israel enjoyed neither crop because of their refusal to hear the word of the Lord (Sec. 1).

They who refuse to hear the word of the Lord are punished even when they are dead and buried, as is evident from what happened in the valley of the dead bones (Sec. 2). Indeed, while God is anxious to treat Israel as an only child, He will treat the children of Israel as slaves when they refuse to listen (Sec. 3), as He had indeed treated them prior to His banishment of them when they annulled all Ten Commandments. Even then, had they kept the Commandment concerning the Sabbath, God would have forgiven them (Sec. 4).

[Hear ye the word of the Lord,
O house of Jacob, and all the families
of the house of Israel (Jer. 2:4).]¹

1. *Hear ye the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel* (Jer. 2:4). Scripture says, *If they hearken and serve Him, they shall spend their years in prosperity*,

1. Jer. 2:4-28; 3:4 is read as the haftarah on the second of the three Sabbaths preceding the Fast of the Ninth of Ab.

married to a king. But when he said to me, 'Serve me a cup,' I would not serve it to him, and he became angry at me and put me out of his house. Had I been willing to serve him the cup, I would now be adding honor to the honor I already had, for I would have remained in my own place. And yet you dare say to me: 'Rise and serve me a cup!'"

So Israel say to the nations of the earth: Had we sung songs in our own place before the Holy One, blessed be He, for all the miracles which He did for us, we would have abided in our place and not been banished from our Land. And so now, shall we sing songs before alien gods? Thereupon the Babylonians rose up in slaughter of the children of Israel and heaped multitudes upon multitudes. Though many of them were slain, nevertheless there was gladness among the children of Israel, because they had not sung before an alien god, as is said *For though they laid us on heaps, there was gladness* (Ps. 137:3).

At that slaughter the Holy One, blessed be He, swore a round oath. If one dare say such a thing, He pronounced a curse²⁴ upon Himself: If I do not carry out My oath, that is, as Scripture says, *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let My right hand forget her cunning* (Ps. 137:5). Then the Holy One, blessed be He, drew back His hand and put it behind Him when Israel was banished, as is indicated in the verse *He hath drawn back His right hand from before the enemy* (Lam. 2:3). And if one dare say such a thing, He has not yet returned it to its natural position. Hence it may be concluded that what the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel was this: May I forget My right hand which I have drawn back behind Me, if I do not perform this oath: I will not forget you among the nations of the earth.

Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I remember not Jerusalem; if I set not Jerusalem above my chiefest joy (Ps. 137:6). The Holy One, blessed be He, will restore all its joy to Jerusalem, as is said *And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be*

23. So AV, margin; IV: And our tormentors asked of us mirth.

24. "a curse"—Parma MS.

Israel there were none superlatively comely except for the people of Beri. It is said that when a man comes among them, he does not wish to leave without committing a sin of the body.¹⁹

3. Who is alluded to in the word *also* in the phrase *we also wept*²⁰ (Ps. 137:1)? [God]. For the children of Israel caused the Holy One, blessed be He, to weep with them.

R. Isaac expounded the verse *We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof* (Ps. 137:2). Come and see how [longing for] the soil of the Land of Israel [stirs] to repentance.²¹ While the children of Israel were in the Land of Israel, Jeremiah used to say: Repent, before the decree of judgment against you be sealed, but they would not. As soon as they were exiled, however, they began according reverence to the commandments. [Refrusing to sing the songs of Zion to the Babylonians], they took their harps and hanged them upon the willows.

For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song, etc. (Ps. 137:3). At the time of Israel's captivity the nations of the earth said to them: Stand up and sing before the idols as you used to sing in the Temple. They replied: Had we sung songs in our own place for all the miracles which He did for us in our own place,²² we would not have been carried away captive; how shall we now sing a song before idols?

R. Isaac the son of Tablai used to say: The preceding dialogue is best understood by means of a parable. By what parable? Of the king who, having married a princess, said to her: "Rise and serve me a cup." Because she was loath to serve him, the king became angry at her and put her out of his house. Thereupon she went and married a man who was stricken with boils. And he said to her: "Rise and serve me a cup." She said to him: "You good-for-nothing! I am a princess of royal blood, and I was

19. See MTeh 137:3 for a parallel to the above.

20. Usually rendered *yea, we wept*. But the word *gm*, "yea," may be understood with equal plausibility as *also*.

21. Parma MS and SPR: "How the earth of the Land of Israel is resistant to repentance."

22. "for all the miracles which He did for us in our own place"—Parma MS.

upon their heads (Isa. 35:10). And he who mourns for Jerusalem in this world will rejoice with her in the time-to-come, as is said *Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her; rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her* (Isa. 66:10). It was said in the name of Abaye: Joy to the world will come only on the Ninth Day of Ab, of yore a day set apart for mourning,²⁵ which the Holy One, blessed be He, will turn into a festive day, as is said *For I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow* (Jer. 31:13).

²⁵ See Piska 26.6, and n. 28.

PISKA 29

SUMMARY

Mourning on the
Ninth of Ab

In keeping with the sadness of the day, priests were enjoined not to bathe on the Ninth day of Ab and hence were ritually unfit to eat the heave offering in the evening. Their heeding of the injunction is proof that the destruction of the Temple is never out of Israel's mind. At the time of its destruction, God is said to have wept (Sec. 1)—is said again to have wept night and day (Sec. 2). He wept for fallen Jerusalem; He wept for those who died from drinking the water of the rivers of Babylon. He wept at Jerusalem's weeping for herself; He wept at Jeremiah's departure from the exiles going into captivity (Sec. 3).

Weeping, she weeps in the night
(Lam. 1:2).¹

1. Let our Masters instruct us: What is the precept that applies to the following question: Is it permissible for priests on the Ninth of Ab to take the bath that makes them ritually fit for the eating of heave offering, the produce set aside for the priests? R. Hanina the deputy High Priest taught: "The House of our God is worthy enough for a priest to give up a bath for its sake."²

¹ The Book of Lamentations is read on the Ninth of Ab, the day on which, according to tradition, both Temples were destroyed. See Piska 26.6, and n. 28.

² All rites observed by a mourner, including abstention from bathing, are observed on the Ninth of Ab (Piska 31.1, and B.Ta 30a). But before eating heave offering in the evening, priests regularly bathed during the day (see B.Ta 13a, and *Mishneh*, ed. Albeck, I, 325-26). R. Hanina ruled that even though such a bath be linked to the performance of a commandment, it is not to be taken on the Ninth of Ab.

calf is cited by way of emphasizing the idea that Israel are for ever God's people and that He is their comforter (Sec. 9). Through Isaiah He came to comfort all the generations (Sec. 10).

SUMMARY

The certainty of
God's comforting

If Boaz' words succeeded in comforting Ruth, surely when God comes to comfort Jerusalem, saying *Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people* (Isa. 40:1), He will succeed (Sec. 1). He will speak to the heart of Jerusalem, because the heart is the seat of all action (Sec. 2). Indeed, it was Jerusalem's heart which inspired her misdeeds—misdeeds which God sought to prevent by having myriads of angels with crowns to crown Israel descend with Him on Sinai; by giving Israel the booty of nations; by providing six meeting places with Israel; by miracles performed in Israel's behalf; by giving the name Zion to Israel, a name that signifies her difference from all other peoples. And so since the breach caused by Israel's misdeeds is so great, only God will be able to heal it and bring comfort to Jerusalem (Sec. 3).

God will comfort Jerusalem through a great prophet, Isaiah, to whom the words *Thou hast loved righteousness* (Ps. 45:8) will apply. Isaiah will prophesy as from the mouth of the Divine Power, with a double portion of the Divine Power (Secs. 4-5). God will speak kind and comforting words to Israel as Joseph spoke to the hearts of his brothers, and, like Joseph, He will succeed in comforting Jerusalem (Sec. 6). And if Job who sinned was eventually given a double recompense, so Jerusalem will eventually be given a double recompense of comfort: *Comfort ye, comfort ye My people* (Sec. 7).

God does not smite a people and leave them desolate. When He brings disaster upon a people, He tries to console them by citing comparable disasters. Indeed, the reason that the Ten Tribes were banished first and after them the Tribe of Judah was to allow them to comfort each other (Sec. 8).

Moses' mode of arguing with God after the incident of the golden

* In Parma MS, fol. 197a-98a, the following passage, not in PE, precedes Piska 29/30B.

Comfort ye, comfort ye My people (Isa. 40:1).

1. These words are to be considered in the light of what Scripture says elsewhere: *Shall mortal man act more justly than God?* (Job 4:17)—shall mere man be more just than his Creator? *Shall [comforting uttered by] a man be more radiant than his Maker's?*¹ (*ibid.*) By these words the Holy One meant: Boaz comforted, and I, at the very least—shall I not comfort as effectively? Boaz began to comfort Ruth by saying *It hath been told and told me* (Ruth 2:11). Why did he use *told* twice? Because he meant: Your good conduct in the house has been told me,² and your good conduct in the field has been told me. And Boaz continued: It has been told *what*³ *thou hast done for thy mother-in-law even after the death of thy husband* (*ibid.*)—and need I speak of what you did for her while your husband was still alive? It has been told *how thou hast left thy father and thy mother* (*ibid.*), your own flesh and blood; and left *the land of thy nativity* (*ibid.*), your own home. On the other hand, by the words *thy father and thy mother* Boaz may have meant that Ruth forsook idolatry, the words being thus understood as in the verse "Who say to a stock: 'Thou art my father,' and to a stone: 'Thou hast brought us forth'" (Jer. 2:27); and by *the land of thy native ways* Boaz meant further that Ruth forsook the ways to which she was accustomed. And in saying *thou art come unto a people which a short time ago thou wouldst not have been permitted to know*

1. IV: *Shall mortal man be just before God? Shall a man be pure before his Maker?* Apparently the commentator construes *thr*, "pure," as though written *zhr*, "be radiant."

2. "Why . . . told me"—parallel in PRKM, p. 263.

3. MT: *All*.

(*ibid.*).⁴ Boaz meant: Had you come a short time ago we could not have accepted you as a proselyte, because the new interpretation of the law concerning proselytes had not yet been established, the new interpretation being as follows: "An Ammonite man may not marry an Israelite woman, but an Ammonite woman [who has been converted] may marry an Israelite. A Moabite man may not marry an Israelite woman, but a Moabite woman [who has been converted] may marry an Israelite."⁵ [And Boaz said further to Ruth]: *The Lord recompense thy work* (Ruth 2:12), by which he meant, "He who gives recompense to the righteous will give you your recompense." And *thy reward will be complete* (*šlmh*) (*ibid.*), the word *šlmh* hinting, so taught R. Jose, that Solomon (*Šlmh*)⁶ will descend from you. Boaz continued: *From the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to take refuge* (*ibid.*). According to Scripture, taught R. Abin, the earth has wings, the morning star has wings, the sun has wings, the cherubim have wings, the seraphim have wings. And the proof that the earth has wings? The verse *From under the wing of the earth have we heard songs: "Glory to the righteous"* (Isa. 24:16). Proof that the morning star has wings? The verse *If I take the wings of the morning* (Ps. 139:9). Proof that the sun has wings? The verse *But unto you that fear My name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings* (Mal. 3:20). Proof that the cherubim have wings? The verse *And the sound of the wings of the cherubim* (Ezek. 10:5). Proof that the seraphim have wings? The verse *Above Him stood the seraphim; each one had six wings* (Isa. 6:2). Great is the power of those who do deeds of kindness, for they are not given refuge merely under the wings of any of the creatures mentioned above! In whose shadow, then, are they given refuge? In the shadow of

4. JV: and art come unto a people that thou knewest not heretofore.

5. See [Piska 49:2]; Yeb 8:3; and MTeH 1:1. Ruth came from Moab.

6. Since the text had already stated *The Lord recompense thy work*, why add and *thy reward will be complete*? Hence the commentator concludes that the words added intimate an additional and extraordinary gift to Ruth, namely, that among her descendants was to be Solomon ("the complete one") in whose days Israel's glory was "complete." See [Piska 15, Preamble].

the Holy One: *The God of Israel under whose wings thou art come to take refuge* (Ruth 2:12). Of this refuge, Scripture says, *Precious is the loving-kindness ordained by Thee, O God! Because of it, the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Thy wings* (Ps. 36:8).

Then Ruth answered Boaz: *I have surely found favor in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken to the heart of thy handmaid* (Ruth 2:13). "Heaven forbid! No!" said Boaz (Ruth 2:14), "speak not of yourself as a handmaid—you are counted among the Matriarchs."⁸ Now does it not follow logically that if Boaz who spoke kind words to Ruth succeeded in comforting her, surely when the Holy One comes to comfort Jerusalem, and says *Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people*, He will succeed in comforting her.

2. *Speak ye comfortably to the heart of Jerusalem* (Isa. 40:2). Elsewhere Scripture says, *I spoke with my own heart* (Eccles. 1:16). According to Scripture, the heart can see, the heart can speak, the heart can know, the heart can hear, the heart can stand, the heart can fall, the heart can walk, the heart can cry out, the heart can be glad, and the heart can be comforted. The proof that the heart can see? The verse *Yea, my heart had seen much experience* (*ibid.*). Proof that the heart can speak? The verse *I spoke with my own heart* (*ibid.*). Proof that the heart can know? The verse *The heart knoweth its own bitterness* (Prov. 14:10). Proof that the heart can hear? The verse *Give thy servant therefore an understanding heart* (1 Kings 3:9). Proof that the heart can stand? The verse *Can thy heart stand and endure, or can thy hands be strong?* (Ezek. 22:14). Proof that the heart can fall? The verse *Let no man's heart fall⁹ within him* (1 Sam. 17:32). Proof that the heart can walk? The verse *And he said unto him: "Went*

7. Since the word *lh*, "to her," is spelled exceptionally without the *mappik*, it is construed as though spelled *l*, "no."

8. In the Hebrew there is a play on 'amahot, "handmaidens," and 'immahot, "Matriarchs." The word *n'mnt*, "worthy of trust," in Parma MS, I take to be a miswriting of *nmnyl*, "counted." Cf. parallel in PRKM, p. 265.

9. JV: *fall*.

[*unsown*]? Shall the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree ever again bear no fruit? [Indeed not!] From this day will I bless thee (Haggai 2:19). Zion answered: Haggai, yesterday you said to me, I called for a drought upon the land . . . and upon the corn, and upon the wine, and upon the oil (Haggai 1:11). And now you say to me, The Lord saith: Shall the seed ever again remain in the barn [*unsown*]? Which am I to believe?

Zechariah came, and said to Zion: Rise up and receive the cup of your comforting. She answered: What do you bring me? What is in your cup? He replied: The Holy One, blessed be He, said through me: I am very sore displeased with the nations that are at ease (Zech. 1:15). Zion said: Yesterday you declared: The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers (Zech. 1:2), and so on.

Malachi came to comfort her, etc. He said: And all the nations shall call you happy; for ye shall be a delightful land, saith the Lord of hosts (Mal. 3:12), etc. [Zion replied:] Yesterday you said: I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts (Mal. 1:10). And now you say, For ye shall be a delightful land, etc.

All the Prophets came before the Holy One, blessed be He, saying to Him: Master of the universe, we sought to comfort Zion, but she would not heed. The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: Come with Me. You and I shall go to her and comfort her: Comfort ye, comfort ye together with Me,⁸ saith your God.

3. Another comment: Comfort ye, comfort ye My people. According to R. Berechiah the Priest, the words are to be read: "Comfort Me, comfort Me, O My people." In the world's use, if a man owns a vineyard and robbers come and cut it down, who is to be comforted, the vineyard or the owner of the vineyard? And so, too, if a man owns a house and robbers come and burn it down, who is to be comforted, the house or the owner of the house? Ye are My vineyard: For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel (Isa. 5:7). But Nebuchadnezzar came, and having destroyed it and banished you, burned My Temple. It is I that need to be comforted: "Comfort Me, comfort Me, O My people."

8. The word 'ammi, "My people," is here vocalized 'immi, "with Me."

4. Another comment: Comfort ye, comfort ye My people. Whatever words Jeremiah spoke in prophecy of pain, Isaiah came with the promise of healing. Jeremiah prophesied pain, saying: How doth the city sit solitary! . . . How is she become as a widow! (Lam. 1:1). But Isaiah came and said, I see her as a virgin.⁹ As a young man espouseth a virgin, so shall thy sons espouse thee (Isa. 62:5). Jeremiah struck terror in saying Weeping, she weepeth (Lam. 1:2). Isaiah came and promised healing, O people that dwellest in Zion at Jerusalem, thou shalt weep no more, etc. (Isa. 30:19). Jeremiah struck terror in saying Judah is gone into exile (Lam. 1:3); Isaiah came and promised healing: And He . . . will assemble the dispersed of Israel (Isa. 11:12). Jeremiah struck terror in saying The ways of Zion do mourn (Lam. 1:4); Isaiah came and promised healing: Hark! one calleth: "Clear ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord" (Isa. 40:3). Jeremiah struck terror in saying Her adversaries are become the head (Lam. 1:5); then Isaiah came and promised healing: And the sons of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee (Isa. 60:14). Jeremiah came and struck terror in saying And gone is from the daughter of Zion all her splendor (Lam. 1:6). And who was her splendor? The Holy One, blessed be He, of whom it is written "Thou art clothed with glory and splendor" (Ps. 104:1). Isaiah came and promised healing, saying, I see Him coming: Who is this that cometh from Edom? . . . This that is splendid in His apparel? (Isa. 63:1). Jeremiah struck terror in saying Jerusalem remembereth . . . all her treasures that she had (Lam. 1:7). Isaiah came and promised healing: I create new heavens and a new earth . . . and the former things shall not be remembered (Isa. 65:17). Jeremiah struck terror in saying Jerusalem hath grievously sinned (Lam. 1:8). Isaiah came and promised healing: I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions (Isa. 44:22). Jeremiah struck terror in saying Her filthiness was in her skirts (Lam. 1:9). Isaiah came and promised healing, but in this instance—as R. Joshua ben Haninah pointed out—Isaiah promised it in a verse hard to understand, namely, When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion (Isa. 4:4).

9. "I see her as a virgin"—Parma MS; PE: "I see a virgin."

testify to thy plight? What shall I liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? (Lam. 2:13). What did Jeremiah have in mind when he spoke this verse? He spoke it with a view to comforting Jerusalem [by likening her suffering to the suffering of other cities that had been plundered]. Like all the Prophets, he sought a likeness for Jerusalem but could not find an appropriate one. In this regard consider the parable of a man whose wife dies and whose friends come in to comfort him. If he refuses to be comforted for his wife as they seek to comfort him, they say to him: "Was your wife more beautiful than So-and-so's wife who also died, yet for whom he let himself be comforted?" If he is grieving for his son, they say to him: "Was your son any more comely than the son of So-and-so?" Hence you find when the Holy One, blessed be He, brings chastisement upon a city, another one in a similar plight is paired with it so as to comfort it. When God brought chastisement upon Nineveh, Alexandria in Egypt was paired with it as having been in a similar plight, as is said *And it shall come to pass, that all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say: "Nineveh is laid waste . . . Whence shall I seek comforters for thee?" Art thou better than No-amon, that was situate among the rivers? . . . Yet she was carried away, she went into captivity* (Nahum 3:7-10). When [chastisement came] upon Alexandria, so as to comfort Alexandria, Nineveh was mentioned as having been in a similar plight, as Scripture says, *Say unto Pharaoh . . . Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon* (Ezek. 31:2-3), but then concludes *Strangers, terrible ones, did cut him off* (Ezek. 31:12). As for the congregation of Israel, however, Scripture found nothing in a similar plight to pair her with, so that Israel turned to God, saying, *Behold, as the eyes of servants unto the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look unto the Lord our God, until He be gracious unto us* (Ps. 123:2). Thus when Hosea came, he paired God with the congregation of Israel, [so that in seeking to comfort Israel, at last the Prophets had something appropriate to say]: *Be glad then, ye children of Zion,*

2. See Hos. 2:18.

and rejoice in the Lord your God (Joel 2:23); and also, *I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying* (Isa. 65:19).

2. When the children of Israel were banished from their Land, the Holy One, blessed be He, asked: Whom would you have lead you out? Your Patriarchs? Then I shall raise up any one of them from his grave, and he will lead you. Whether it be Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, whether Moses or Aaron, I shall raise him from his grave, and he will lead you. Or if you would have David or Solomon, I shall raise either of them from his grave, and he will lead you. The congregation of Israel replied: Master of the universe, we do not wish any one of these—only Thee, as is said *Thou art our Father; for Abraham knoweth us not, and Israel doth not acknowledge us; Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer from everlasting is Thy name* (Isa. 63:16). The Holy One, blessed be He, answered: Since ye plead thus, I will go up with you to Babylon, as is said *For your sake I had Myself go to Babylon*³ (Isa. 43:14); and also, *I will set My throne in Elam* (Jer. 49:38).

In this connection consider the parable of a king wed to a wife who was with him for many years, but by whom he had no children. He said to her: "My dear, go and get married to another man—perhaps you will have children by him. And when you go forth, take every precious thing that I have in my⁴ house." She said: "If it must be so, I will make a banquet for you, and we will eat and drink, and then I shall take gracious leave of you, so that people will not say: Look you, the king's wife—he hates her, and he has put her out of his house." The king said to her: "Very well." Thereupon she made a banquet, and the king ate and drank until he was drunk. At midnight she summoned her servants, and they rose up and brought him out on his couch to her father's house. When the king awoke from his sleep, he asked:

3. IV: *For your sake I have sent to Babylon*. But see Piska 28, n. 17.

4. "my"—Parma MS; PE: "your."

"What place is this I am lying in?" She replied: "In my father's house." He asked: "And for what reason am I in your father's house?" She replied: "Because of what you said to me, 'Every precious thing I have, take and go forth.' Except for you, [my lord], I have nothing which is a delight to my eyes and a joy to my life." Likewise the congregation of Israel, when the Holy One, blessed be He, said to them: "Whom do you wish that I raise up out of his grave, to lead you to Babylon?" they replied: We want none except Thee, as is said *For Thou art our Father*. Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, said: I will be thy companion, and I shall go up with you, as is said *For your sake I had Myself go to Babylon* (Isa. 43:14).

3. Another comment: *Comfort ye, comfort ye My people*. Why is *Comfort ye* said twice? Because in *Weeping, she will weep* (Lam. 1:2), *weep* is said twice, so the Holy One, blessed be He, said: I shall now comfort you twice, *Comfort ye, comfort ye My people*.

Another comment: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Abraham: "Go and comfort Jerusalem; maybe she will accept comforting from thee." Abraham went to her and said, "Receive comforting from me." She replied: "How can I receive comforting from you who thought of me as no more than a [bare] mountain, as is said *In the Mount where the Lord can be seen*"⁵ (Gen. 22:14). God then said to Isaac: "Go and comfort Jerusalem; maybe she will accept comforting from thee." Isaac went and spoke as Abraham had. Jerusalem replied: "How can I receive comforting from you, from whom Esau the wicked came forth, Esau who [with the power of the blessing he got from you], was able to make a barren field out of me, as is said *And Esau went forth to the field* (Gen. 27:5), whereby Scripture intimates that his descendants were to reduce me to ashes."⁶ God said to Jacob as He had to Isaac: "Go and comfort Jerusalem." But she replied to Jacob:

5. In Jewish tradition the Land of Moriah, to one of whose hills Abraham took Isaac, is identified as the site of the Temple in Jerusalem. See Piska 40b.
6. See Sif Deut. 352.

"How can I receive comforting from you who envisioned my obliteration in saying of God's House in Jerusalem *This is none*"? (Gen. 28:17)? God said to Moses as He had to Jacob: "Go and comfort." Jerusalem replied to Moses: "How can I receive comforting from you who have set down in writing the curses and evil decrees directed at me: *The wasting of hunger, and the devouring of the fiery bolt, and so on*" (Deut. 32:24)? Thereupon all of the Patriarchs went and said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Jerusalem will not accept any comforting from us, as is said *O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted*" (Isa. 54:11). At once the Holy One, blessed be He, answered: It is for Me to comfort Jerusalem in keeping with what I have written: *He that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution* (Exod. 22:5). Since I set her on fire, as is said *From on high hath He sent fire* (Lam. 1:13), I must comfort her, as is said *For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall against the fire*⁷ round about (Zech. 2:9).

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: I wrote in the Torah, *Thou shalt not deliver a bondman unto [another] master* (Deut. 23:16); yet I turned the children of Israel over to the nations of the earth, as is said *Their Rock had given them over, and the Lord had delivered them up* (Deut. 32:30). I wrote *Thou shalt not entirely reap the corners of thy field* (Lev. 19:9); yet I vented My wrath entirely, as is said *The Lord hath vented His fury entirely* (Lam. 4:11). Indeed were they not diminished for their sins [by My wrath], no creature could ever prevail against them, against Israel.

In this connection consider the story of a heathen who was pursuing an Israelite with the intention of killing him. But he could not catch up with him until it chanced that a snake came along, wound itself around the Israelite's ankle, and brought him down. Then the Israelite said to the heathen, "Let me tell you something: Had not the Holy One, blessed be He,

7. An intimation that the Temple would be destroyed. See Sif Deut. 352, and Gen. Rabbah 69:7. According to the Rabbis, Abraham as well as Jacob was shown the entire unfolding of Jewish history. See Piska 15:2; and MTeh 40:4.
8. IV: a wall of fire.

to her, then you can do as you like with her, because a man is master of his wife. But if you are not of a mind to return to her, you should divorce her so that she can go marry another.

Similarly Jeremiah said to the Holy One, blessed be He: *Master of the universe, Hast Thou utterly rejected Judah? Hath Thy soul loathed Zion?* (Jer. 14:19). If Thou shouldst be of a mind to return to us, *Why dost Thou smite us, so that there is no healing for us?* (*ibid.*).

God replied to Jeremiah: For My answer go to thy teacher and to the teacher of thy teacher—that is, to Moses, teacher of all the Prophets. This is what I said to Moses at the end of all My angry rebukes of Israel: *And yet for all their contrariness . . . I will not reject them, neither will I abhor them* (Lev. 26:44)—and indeed I have not rejected them, neither have I abhorred them. Thus God answered Jeremiah concerning two things, His rejecting and His abhorring; but He did not answer him concerning the two others. When Zion saw that Jeremiah had asked the Holy One, blessed be He, about four things altogether, namely rejecting, abhorring, forsaking, and forgetting, she began demanding answers concerning the two others. *Zion said: Is it that the Lord is forsaking me, that the Lord is forgetting me?*

4. Further comment on the question Zion asked in the verse beginning *Zion said*: When Nebuchadnezzar came and burned the Temple and banished Israel, taking them into captivity, he allowed no halts for rest in all of the Land of Israel; the Babylonians pressed hard upon the Israelites, who said *We are pursued [with a heavy yoke] on our necks* (Lam. 5:5). And why did they press so hard upon them? Because the Babylonians feared for their own lives, saying: "The God of this nation is waiting for them to repent. It may be that they will repent while they are still in their own Land, and He will then deal with us as He dealt with Sennacherib." Therefore the Babylonians allowed no halts for rest in the entire Land of Israel. It was only when the children of Israel came to the rivers of Babylon, where the Babylonians felt that the Israelites were completely in their power on Babylonian land, that Nebuchadnezzar allowed a halt.

Thereupon some Israelites turned to food and drink; and some turned to weeping and mourning.

Nebuchadnezzar asked: "Why do you sit weeping?" And he called to the Tribe of Levi and said to them: "Get ready! While we eat and drink, I want you to stand and strike your harps before me, as you struck them in your Temple before your God." The Levites looked at one another and said: "Is it not enough of a torment for us that by our sins we destroyed His Temple? Must we now strike our harps for this dwarf?"¹⁴ Thereupon they all stood up, with one accord hung their harps upon the willows there by the river, and then, putting their thumbs into their mouths, with extraordinary will power they either mangled their thumbs or bit them off.

We know what happened from what David says: *By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept . . . upon the willows in the midst thereof we hanged up our harps* (Ps. 137:1-2). First, the Tribe of Levi hung up their harps upon the willows there at the river edge. *For there they that led us captive asked of us words of song, and our tormentors asked of us mirth: "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." How shall we sing the Lord's song?* (Ps. 137:3-4). Scripture does not say, "We shall not sing," but says *How shall we sing?* Then the Levites showed the Babylonians their fingers and said: Do you know, O Nebuchadnezzar, that in wearing manacles as strong as iron is, our fingers were mangled? Look! How can we sing?

Thereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, said: You showed extraordinary will power when you mangled your thumbs. As you live, the answers to Jeremiah's and Zion's questions concerning My forsaking and My forgetting, answers which I did not give to them, I now give to you—in the words of Scripture, *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let My right hand forget her cunning* (Ps. 137:5). Nay more, because you showed such extraordinary will power in what you did to the thumbs of your right hands, I, too, say, *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let My right hand forget her cunning*.

And if one is reluctant to conclude from this passage what

¹⁴ See the lowest of men (Dan. 4:14).

happened at the rivers of Babylon, one may be persuaded by another passage. To begin with, one finds that the Temple was rebuilt after seventy years. And in the year that Cyrus told them that they were to go up and rebuild the Temple—*Whosoever there is among you of all his people, his God be with him, let him go up* (Ezra 1:3)—then, according to Scripture, the priests, the Levites, and the heads of households rose up to go, as is said *Then rose up the priests, the Levites, and the heads of households . . . to go up to build the House of the Lord* (Ezra 1:5). Yet Scripture, after saying that the Levites rose up to go, surprisingly quotes Ezra as asserting that none of the sons of Levi were there: *I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava . . . and I viewed the people and the priests—and found there none of the sons of Levi* (Ezra 8:15). Actually they were there; what Ezra meant was that they could not make their presence known—they could not strike their harps because their thumbs were mangled. But how do we know that those sons of Levi now on their way to the Land actually knew from previous experience how to strike their harps but could not by reason of their mangled thumbs? ¹⁵ Because it is these sons of Levi who are spoken of further on in Scripture as the very ones who had been exiled from the Land: *The sons of Levi . . . that were come out of captivity into Jerusalem . . . who were ancient men that had seen the first House . . . wept with a loud voice* (Ezra 3:8, 12).

5. In further comment on the question Zion asked concerning forsaking and forgetting, the verse from Psalms is read *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may My right hand be forgotten* (Ps. 137:5). According to R. Eleazar hak-Kappar, God meant: My Torah is in your hands, and the time of redemption is in My hands. Each of us has need of the other. If you need Me to bring the time of redemption, I need you to keep My Torah and bring about sooner the rebuilding of My House and of Jerusalem. [We are inseparable]. As I cannot bring Myself to forget the time of re-

¹⁵ Literally "How do we know that some of the sons of Levi who were exiled from the Land were now returning thereto?"

demption, for that would mean that *My right hand [would] be forgotten*, so you are not at liberty to forget the Torah, of which it is written *At His right hand was a fiery law unto them* (Deut. 33:2).

Another comment: *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem*. When Israel went into exile, the Presence went into exile along with them. The ministering angels said: "Master of the universe, let the glory of Thy presence remain in its proper place. Demean not Thy presence." The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: Were not certain things stipulated between Me and Israel? I stipulated with their fathers that at the time they were well off I would be with them, and if they were not well off My glory would be with them, as is said *I will be with him in trouble* (Ps. 91:15). R. Abbahu said in the name of R. Simeon ben Lakish: You find that when the Holy One, blessed be He, saw the children of Israel [with their hands] tied behind their backs, *He also drew back His right hand* (Lam. 2:3). (Let the reader be content with the plain meaning of the text, [without seeking its deeper implications]).¹⁶ And all the time that Israel are held in pawn in this world, the right hand of the Holy One, blessed be He, is also held in pawn. David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, dost Thou think that there is no need for Thee to bring closer the time of redemption? Even if there be no such need for our sake, bring the time closer for Thy right hand's sake. How long shall Thy right hand be held in pawn? *O that Thy beloved may be delivered, save Thy right hand, and answer me* (Ps. 60:7). Therefore when Zion said: *Hath He forsaken me? Hath He forgotten me?* the Holy One, blessed be He, replied: Can I indeed forget thee? My right hand is held in pawn on account of thee; how shall I forget thee? Even if I forget thee, can I forget My right hand? *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let My right hand be forgotten*.

6. Another comment: *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem*. R. Levi said in the name of R. Hama the son of R. Hanina: In the time-to-

¹⁶ "Let the reader . . . seeking its deeper implications!"—Parma MS.

And the turrets upon thy walls I shall make of *kadkod*, and thy gates of gems hollowed out⁸ (Isa. 54:12). According to R. Abba bar Kahana, *kadkod* means "this and that,"⁹ and thus it indicates that the stones of which the turrets are made will be stibium and sapphires. According to R. Joshua ben Levi, who reads the verse *And luminaries to give thee light*¹⁰ I shall make of *kadkod*, the luminaries will be made of "kadkedony"—chalcedony,¹¹ that is.

R. Joshua ben Levi stood with [the prophet] Elijah on Mount Carmel. He said to Elijah: Will you not show me these stones of chalcedony, show me what they look like? Elijah said: "Yes," and contrived a miracle in order to show them to R. Joshua ben Levi. It so happened that a ship which was then sailing in the Great Sea was seized by a gale and tossed about from the top of the waves to the sea bottom. On the ship there was a Jewish lad to whom the good Elijah appeared. He said to the lad: "If you will do an errand for me, I will save this vessel for your sake." The lad said: "Very well." Elijah said: "Go and show R. Joshua ben Levi who lives in the great city of Lydda the stones of *kadkod* [that you can pick up from the sea bottom]."¹² But do not show them <to him> in Lydda itself. Take him to the cave of Lydda and there show them to him." The lad went and said to R. Joshua ben Levi: "Follow me." He took him to the cave and when he showed the stones to him, at once all of Lydda was illuminated by their light. According to R. Isaac, when R. Joshua ben Levi saw the precious stones, he was so startled that he let them fall to the ground and they disappeared.¹³

8. IV: and thy gates of carbuncles. But see below, p. 625.

9. *Kadkod*, which occurs only twice in the Bible, can be read *kad kad*, "this and that." See MTeh 87:1.

10. The word *im* may mean "sun" and so "luminary," as well as "battlement, pinnacle, turret."

11. In the messianic time precious stones would thus take the place of the sun in illuminating Jerusalem. See Exod. Rabbah 15:21, and Ginzberg, *Legends*, 4, 221.

12. "In all ages chalcedony has been the stone most used by the gem engraver, and many colored varieties, described under special headings, are still cut and polished as ornamental stones" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1.9.). Some of its varieties are agate, carnelian, onyx, and sardonyx.

13. See Ginzberg, *Legends*, 6, 333.

14. "that he let them fall to the ground and they disappeared"—so Parma MS and SPR; PE: "he was so startled that he was cut off."

And so, according to R. Joshua ben Levi, the phrase in Isaiah is read *luminaries to give thee light*, not "turrets" but sources of illumination for people to see by.

And thy gates of gems hollowed out,¹⁴ and all thy borders of precious stones (Isa. 54:12). Just what is meant by this verse? That the Holy One, blessed be He, will hollow the great gate of the Temple together with its two wickets from a gem, a pearl of purest ray.

R. Johanan sat in his chair expounding: The Holy One, blessed be He, will hollow the great gate of the Temple and the two wickets out of one gem. A certain man, a traveling merchant, who was present, said: What is this person, in a teacher's chair no less, expounding and saying?¹⁵ That the Holy One, blessed be He, will hollow the great gate of the Temple and its two wickets from a gem, a pearl of purest ray? Why, you cannot find a pearl even as large as a pigeon's egg.

The merchant then sailed upon the Great Sea, and his ship sank to the bottom of the sea. But the Holy One, blessed be He, gave light to his eyes, and there he saw ministering angels hollowing and shaping a pearl. He asked them: "What is this for?" They replied: "For the great gate of the Temple."

A year later,¹⁶ he returned and found R. Johanan sitting in his chair and expounding that the Holy One, blessed be He, would hollow the great gate of the Temple with its two wickets out of a gem, a pearl of purest ray. The man said: "Expound away! It is fitting that you should expound." R. Johanan asked: "What have you seen that now makes you speak in such approval of me?" The man replied: "Had I not beheld with mine own eyes what you are talking about, I still would not believe you." What did R. Johanan do? He lifted his eyes and looked at the man—in that instant the man turned into a heap of bones.

<And all thy borders of precious stones. Because borders [of

14. The commentator interprets *kad* in the sense of "to bore, hollow out," and not in the sense of "kindle" (hence "carbuncle," as in IV). See Rashi on B.Sanh 100a.

15. "A certain man . . . and saying"—Parma MS; PE: "A certain man sat there expounding [in mockery]."

16. Presumably when the same hafarah was read again.

SUMMARY

The light of the Messiah

On account of the Torah, Israel is destined in the time-to-come to enjoy God's light, the Messiah, but Satan and the nations' princely counterparts in heaven will be shaken at the sight of him.

At the time of his creation, the Messiah was told that the sins of souls as yet unborn would bend him down under a yoke of iron for seven years; but that if the prospect of such suffering saddened him, these souls would be made to perish. With joy the Messiah took this suffering upon himself so that no one in Israel would perish. God's love for Israel is such that when the heavenly counterparts of the princes of the kingdoms bring charges against the Messiah's generation, God will reject the charges outright (Sec. 1).

For seven years the Messiah, now referred to as Ephraim, will endure the suffering decreed for him even as God will endure the pain of Israel's banishment. At Israel's return from exile, God himself will go at the head of them.

In the year in which the king Messiah will reveal himself, all the kings of the nations of the earth will be at strife with one another. Fearful of this strife, Israel will be reassured by God: "Why are you afraid? The time of your redemption is come. You will never again be enslaved by the kingdoms." Then the Messiah will make a proclamation to Israel, saying: "Meek ones, the day of your redemption is come. If you do not believe me, behold my light which rises upon you." At that time the nations of the earth will be in darkness, and they will seek the light of the Messiah and of Israel: every one in Israel will have 2,800 disciples from the nations of the earth (Sec. 2).

*Arise, shine, for thy light is come,
and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.*

*For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
and gross darkness the peoples; but upon thee
the Lord will arise, and His glory shall be
seen upon thee (Isa. 60:1-2).¹*

1. These words are to be considered in the light of what David king of Israel was inspired by the holy spirit to say: *For with thee is the fountain of life; in Thy light do we see light* (Ps. 36:10). What did David have in mind when he uttered this verse? He had in mind the congregation of Israel who said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, on account of the Torah Thou hast given me, the Torah which is called "fountain of life," I am destined to enjoy Thy light in the time-to-come.

What is meant by *in Thy light do we see light*? What light is it that the congregation of Israel looks for as from a watchtower? It is the light of the Messiah, of which it is said *And God saw the light that it was good* (Gen. 1:4). This verse proves that the Holy One, blessed be He, contemplated the Messiah and his works before the world was created,² and then under His throne of glory put away His Messiah until the time of the generation in which he will appear.

Satan asked the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, for whom is the light which is put away under Thy throne of glory?

God replied: For him who will turn thee back and put thee to utter shame.

Satan said: Master of the universe, show him to me.

God replied: Come and see him. And when he saw him, Satan was shaken, and he fell upon his face and said: Surely, this is the Messiah who will cause me and all the counterparts in heaven of the princes of the earth's nations to be swallowed up in

1. According to Friedmann (n.1), Isa. 60:1-22 was read as the haftarah on the seventh of the seven Sabbaths of Consolation, specifically on the Sabbath *Nisukhim* (Deut. 29:9-30:20).

2. Cf. Piska 33.6.

Gehenna, as is said *He will swallow up death for ever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces* (Isa. 25:8).³ In that hour all princely counterparts of⁴ the nations, in agitation, will say to Him: Master of the universe, who is this through whose power we are to be swallowed up? What is his name? What kind of a being is he?

The Holy One, blessed be He, will reply: He is the Messiah, and his name is Ephraim,⁵ My true Messiah, who will pull himself up straight and will pull up straight his generation, and who will give light to the eyes of Israel and deliver his people; and no nation or people will be able to withstand him, as is said *The enemy shall not do him violence, nor the son of wickedness afflict him* (Ps. 89:23). And all his enemies and adversaries shall be beaten before him,⁶ as is said *I will beat to pieces his adversaries before him* (Ps. 89:24). And even seas and rivers will [yield to his power and] stop flowing,⁷ as is said *I will set his hand also on the sea, and his right hand on the rivers* (Ps. 89:26). [At the time of the Messiah's creation], the Holy One, blessed be He, will tell him in detail what will befall him: There are

3. See Piska 37:1.

4. "all princely counterparts of"—Parma MS.

5. In no other work is the Messiah designated as Ephraim. Consequently N. Krochmal believed that an individual named Ephraim made himself out as the Messiah and was seized by the authorities (see his *Moreh nehu'ke haz-a'eman*, ed. Rawidowicz, chap. 14, p. 255).

Nowhere else apparently is the Messiah represented as bearing the sins of the people of Israel. Accordingly Azariah dei Rossi, following Abraham Farissol, held that this passage was added under Christian influence (see his *M'or 'enayim*, ed. Cassel [Wilno, 1866], chap. 19, p. 250). In more recent years Eppenstein, in *MGH/I*, 55 (1911), 626–28, and Bamberger, in *HUCA*, 15 (1940), 429, followed this view. According to Bamberger (loc. cit., p. 431), Ephraim is the idealized representative of the "Mourners for Zion."

I am inclined to believe that the idea of the suffering Messiah may be native Jewish tradition (see Piska 37, n. 2). References to his sufferings are found in Piska 31:10; and possibly in MTeh 2:9. See Isaac Hirsch Weiss, *Dor dor we-dor'aw* (New York-Berlin, 5684/1924), 3, 287.

6. "shall be beaten before him"—Parma MS; PE: "scatter to flight."

7. "And even seas and rivers will [yield to his power and] stop flowing"—Parma MS; to make it possible for the scattered children of Israel to go to the Land of Israel without let or hindrance. FT: "And even rivers will stop flowing into the sea."

souls that have been put away with thee under My throne, and it is their sins which will bend thee down under a yoke of iron and make thee like a calf whose eyes grow dim with suffering, and will choke thy spirit as with a yoke; because of the sins of these souls thy tongue will cleave to the roof of thy mouth. Art thou willing to endure such things?

The Messiah will ask the Holy One, blessed be He: Will my suffering last many years?

The Holy One, blessed be He, will reply: Upon thy life and the life of My head, it is a period of seven years which I have decreed for thee. But if thy soul is sad at the prospect of thy suffering, I shall at this moment banish these sinful souls.

The Messiah will say: Master of the universe, with joy in my soul and gladness in my heart I take this suffering upon myself, provided that not one person in Israel perish; that not only those who are alive be saved in my days, but that also those who are dead, who died from the days of Adam up to the time of redemption;⁸ and that not only these be saved in my days, but also those who died as abortions; and that not only these be saved in my days, but all those whom Thou thoughtest to create but were not created. Such are the things I desire, and for these I am ready to take upon myself [whatever Thou decreest].

At these words, the Holy One, blessed be He, will appoint for the Messiah the four creatures who will carry the Messiah's throne of glory.⁹

Thereupon his enemies and the heavenly counterparts of the princes of the kingdoms will say: Come and let us bring charges against the Messiah's generation so that they may never be given existence in the world.

The Holy One, blessed be He, will reply to them: How dare you bring charges against that generation which will be greatly esteemed for its noble conduct, a generation in which I shall re-

8. "but that also those who are dead . . . up to the time of redemption"—Parma MS.

9. The Messiah is thus given an earthly counterpart of God's chariot. See Ezek. 1.

joy, and in which I shall take delight, which I shall uphold because of My pleasure in it, as is said *Behold My servant, whom I uphold, Mine elect in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My spirit upon him*, etc. (Isa. 42:1)? How then dare you bring charges against it? I would as soon cause every one of you to perish, consumed in flame by the firebrands with which you would be girded,¹⁰ but not one breathing creature of the Messiah's generation will I cause to perish.

The foregoing commentary is derived from meditation upon the verse *For with Thee is the fountain of life: in Thy light do we see light*.

2. During the seven-year period preceding the coming of the son of David, iron beams will be brought and loaded upon his neck until the Messiah's body is bent low. Then he will cry and weep, and his voice will rise up to the very height of heaven, and he will say to God: Master of the universe, how much can my strength endure? How much can my spirit endure? How much my breath before it ceases? How much can my limbs suffer? Am I not flesh-and-blood?

It was because of the ordeal of the son of David that David wept, saying *My strength is dried up like a potsherd* (Ps. 22:16). During the ordeal of the son of David, the Holy One, blessed be He, will say to him: Ephraim, My true Messiah, long ago, ever since the six days of creation, thou didst take this ordeal upon thyself. At this moment, thy pain is like My pain. Ever since the day that the wicked Nebuchadnezzar came up and destroyed My House and burned My Temple and banished My children among the nations of the world—and this I swear by thy life and the life of My own head—I have not been able to bring Myself to sit upon My throne. And if thou dost not believe Me, see the night dew that has fallen upon My head, as is said *My head is filled with dew, My locks with the drops of the night* (Song 5:2).

10. See Isa. 50:11.

At these words, the Messiah will reply: Now I am reconciled. The servant is content to be like his Master.

Then, so taught R. Levi, the Holy One, blessed be He, will say to the congregation of Israel: *Arise, shine, for thy light is come*; and Israel will reply: Master of the universe, go!¹¹ Thou art at the head of us. Forthwith the Holy One, blessed be He, will turn in heeding and¹² say to her: My daughter, thou hast made a right request of Me. Scripture reports what passed between God and the congregation of Israel as follows: *My Beloved spoke and said unto me: "Rise up, My love, My fair one, and come away" . . . [and I replied]: my Beloved is to be with me, and I am to be with Him* (Song 2:10, 16).

Another comment: With what may the congregation of Israel in this world be compared? With a cripple who is unable to come or go, so that the nations of the earth revile every Israelite, saying to each one of them every day: Thy God, where is He? Why does He not save thee, seeing thou art subjected to our power, and that we have the means to slay thee, to destroy thee?¹³ The congregation of Israel replies: A day is appointed for me when my king will reveal himself for my sake. He will strengthen me and stand me up on my feet, as is said *For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord* (Ps. 12:6).

R. Isaac taught: In the year in which the king Messiah reveals himself, all the kings of the nations of the earth will be at strife with one another. The king of Persia will make war against a king of Arabia, and this king of Arabia will go to Edom to take counsel from the Edomites. Thereupon the king of Persia will again lay the whole world waste.¹⁴ All the nations of the world will be agitated and frightened, they will fall upon their

11. "go"—Parma MS; IT: "stand."

12. "turn in heeding and"—Parma MS.

13. "seeing thou art . . . to destroy thee"—Parma MS.

14. On the basis of this passage Bernard J. Bamberger argues that Piskas 34-37 were "composed during the period of about five years when Persia and Arabia were both world powers," between the years 632 and 637. See *HUCA*, 15 (1940), 425-31.

faces, and they will be seized with pangs like the pangs of a woman in labor. And Israel, agitated and frightened, will say: Where shall we go, where shall we come? God will reply: My children, be not afraid. <All that I have done, I have done only for your sake. Why are you afraid? Do not fear.> The time of your redemption is come. And this latter redemption will not be like your previous redemption, for following your previous redemption, you suffered anguish and enslavement by the kingdoms; as for this redemption—following this one, you will have no anguish or enslavement by the kingdoms.

Our Masters taught: When the king Messiah appears, he will come stand on the roof of the Temple and will make a proclamation to Israel, saying: Meek ones, the day of your redemption is come. And if you do not believe me, behold my light which rises upon you, as is said *Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee*. And it has risen only upon you and not upon the nations of the earth, as is said *For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples; but upon thee the Lord will arise, and His glory shall be seen upon thee*.

Then the Holy One, blessed be He, will brighten the light of the king Messiah and of Israel, whilst all the nations of the earth will be in darkness—in gross darkness—and they shall walk, all of them, by the light of the Messiah and of Israel, as is said *And nations shall walk at thy light, and kings at the brightness of thy rising* (Isa. 60:3). And they shall come and lick the dust touched by the feet of the king Messiah, as is said [*The inhabitants of the isles shall entreat him and lick the dust of his feet*].¹⁵ And all of them shall come and fall upon their faces before the Messiah and before Israel, and say: Let us be slaves unto thee and unto Israel. And each and every one in Israel will have two thousand and eight hundred slaves, as is said *In that day it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold, out of all the*

¹⁵, "[*The inhabitants . . . his feet*]"—Parma MS and P. The verse in MT which comes closest to this quotation is *and lick the dust of thy feet* (Isa. 49:23).

*languages of the nations, shall even take hold [of each tassel] of the skirt*¹⁶ *of him that is a Jew, saying: "We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you"* (Zech. 8:23).

¹⁶. Ten men out of each of the 70 nations makes 700; and since a garment has four corners, the 700, quadrupled, become 2800. See Rashi on B. Shab. 32b. The proof-verse cited shows that the commentator's term "slaves" is to be understood in the sense of "disciples, followers in true belief."

Cf. Matthew 9:20, 14:36; Mark 5:28, 6:56; Luke 8:44. In these passages the Greek *kraspedon* may be taken to mean "tassel."