

**MIDRASH AGGADAH OF R. MOSHEH HA-DARSHAN AD NUM 30:15**

Another interpretation (of ‘should [her husband] remain silent ...’ [Num 30:15]). The whole of this pericope was uttered solely on account of Israel, for they rebelled against the Holy One, blessed be He, and canceled the Torah. They cast the yoke of the kingdom of heaven off themselves and abandoned the Holy One, blessed be He, and they worshiped instead the Baals and the Asherahs. This is the reason it says: ‘or she bound herself in the house of her father’ (Num 30:4) – Israel is symbolized by the figure of a wife, as when it says ‘and I will betroth you to Myself, etc.’ (Hos 2:21). You will discover that the expression ‘I will betroth you’ occurs five times in this verse, and they correspond to the five books of the Torah, for the Holy One, blessed be He, wed Israel with the five books of the Torah. And the Holy One, blessed be He, is termed a ‘father’: (as in) ‘for You are our Father’ (Isa 63:16). They installed an idol in the Temple above the cherubim (of the ark), and this is what is indicated by ‘and she bound herself in the House of her Father’ (Num 30:4).

The Holy One, blessed be He, reproved them using Jeremiah (upon him be peace!), the one whom the children of Israel stoned (to death) in Egypt.<sup>1</sup> The Egyptians provided him with burial because they loved him, for he had prayed about the aquatic creatures – the crocodiles<sup>2</sup> – who were in the Nile and who were killing the Egyptians. King Alexander exhumed his bones and reburied him in Alexandria.<sup>3</sup>

But he was not the only prophet whom they killed. Indeed a number of others were killed, (such as) Hūr, and Ba‘asha killed Shemaiah the prophet, and Abijah killed Ahijah the Shilonite, and Joash killed Zechariah b. Yehoyada in the courtyard of the Temple, where some of his blood sprayed onto the wall, and so the Shekinah removed itself from the Temple until the time of Isaiah (upon him be peace!), and as for the prophet Isaiah, Manasseh b. Hezekiah killed him: they sawed him with a saw when he had been engulfed by a cedar tree. How many evils they perpetrated, and how much they provoked the Creator!<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Vitae Prophetarum*, s.v. Jeremiah for the same fate. The Christian apocryphon *Paraleipomena Jeremiou* (or *4 Baruch*) also knows a tradition about the fatal stoning of Jeremiah, but places its locale in Palestine.

<sup>2</sup> A problematic cluster of consonants. I have followed Abraham Epstein’s suggestion (slightly adjusted by Wilhelm Bacher) to emend the text’s meaningless Hebrew phrase **התמנו חיים** to **התמסחיים** ‘crocodiles’; see his review of Buber’s edition in *Revue des études juives* 27 (1893): 155, and Bacher’s review in the same volume at p. 311. Their idea was endorsed by Immanuel Löw, “Aramäische Lurchnamen,” in *Judaica: Festschrift zu Hermann Cohens siebzigstem Geburtstag* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1912), 341. See Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (7 vols.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909-38), 6:400; also Betsy Halpern Amaru, “The Killing of the Prophets: Unraveling a Midrash,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 54 (1983): 155 n.9.

<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah’s prowess over reptiles and his posthumous recognition by Alexander also figure in the *Vitae Prophetarum* narrative. This notice about his success against crocodiles should be added to the examples collected by Torrey in his appendix “Jeremiah and the Reptiles of Egypt” *apud* Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Lives of the Prophets: Greek Text and Translation* (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1946), 49-52.

<sup>4</sup> Salomon Buber, ed., *Midrash Aggadah me-Aram Šova ‘al ḥamishah ḥumshey ha-Torah* (Vienna: Fanta, 1893), 157-58. For an analysis of this list of ‘prophet-martyrs,’ see especially Halpern Amaru, “Killing,” 155ff.