

SPEECH ON HAFTARAH OF PARSHAS METZORAH

by Mitchell Rose, Cleveland, Ohio (216)381-5566
mitchrose51@gmail.com www.mitchellrose.us

This haftarah recounts an event that occurred 3000 years ago. The land of Israel was split between the Southern Kingdom, whose capital city was Jerusalem, and the Northern Kingdom, whose capital city was called Shomron. The powerful nation of Aram (in modern day Syria) sent its powerful army to conquer the Northern Kingdom and laid siege to Shomron. There was a famine in Shomron, and the little food that was available was meager and expensive. Things got so bad, that it was reported to the Jewish king in Shomron that the starving Jews were resorting to cannibalism. The king was furious at the prophet Elisha because it was Elisha who predicted the famine would occur. The king sent his minister to kill the prophet Elisha. When the minister arrived at Elisha's house, Elisha told the minister, "I am not making the famine. Gd is. So killing me won't help matters. And besides, Gd told me that in 24 hours from now, food will be very plentiful and very cheap." The minister stated he did not believe such an outlandish prediction. Elisha replied "you will see the plentiful food with your own eyes, but you will not eat any of it." The minister returned to the capital city of Shomron. The next day, there were 4 lepers sitting outside the city. This is in accordance with a rule mentioned in today's Torah portion, that lepers must remain outside a Jewish city until they heal. Well, one leper said to the other lepers, "Why should we sit here, outside the city, until we die of hunger? There is no benefit returning to our homes inside the city, since there is no food inside the city either. Therefore, let's walk over to the camp of the enemy soldiers. Perhaps they will take pity on us and give us food. Even if they kill us, we will not be worse off than we are now." So the lepers walked over to the enemy encampment at night. They found an eerie site. Horses and donkeys were tied to their posts. Tents were standing, full of food and clothes and expensive items.

But there were no people around. The lepers were puzzled where the enemy soldiers went. What the lepers did not know was that the previous evening, the Aramean soldiers imagined hearing the roar of a might attacking army, and figured the mighty Egyptian army must have been hired by the Jews to attack the Arameans. So the Aramean soldiers fled, and in their panic left their tents, animals, food and belongings behind. But the enemy soldiers were just imagining hearing those things. The 4 lepers entered the enemy encampment at night. The lepers ate the plentiful food, and hid the items of silver and gold that they found. Then they went back to their own city (of Shomron). They yelled to the guard on the watchtower and told him what they saw. The guard awakened the Jewish king and reported what he heard. The king, at first, thought it was a trap. He thought enemy soldiers were lying in ambush for the starving townspeople to come get the food. A few Jewish soldiers went to scout out the enemy camp, and found that it was safe. When the starving townspeople heard the good news, they streamed out of the city to plunder the tents of the Arameans. The king's minister saw the prophet's prediction come true: Food truly did become miraculously plentiful and cheap. But, as the prophet predicted, the minister could not eat from it, because he was trampled to death by the stampeding crowd. And that is the story we read from the Haftarah.