

## **Matan Ben Cnaan, Jeremiah, 2018 ; Rembrandt van Rijn, Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem, 1630**

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When the young Rembrandt (aged 24) painted Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem in 1630, he depicted an old man sitting on a rock (?), reflecting and perhaps even lamenting. His left hand leans on a hefty tome, to which someone later added the word BIBLE (just to be clear?). The old man's opulent clothes are decorated with gold embroidery – an allusion to his status prior to the destruction. Beside him are silver and gold objects. The veins and tendons visible on his exposed leg and the furrows in his brow are masterfully depicted, especially when considering the artist's young age. Despite his clear prophecies, nobody heeded his warnings, and he now must watch his beloved city, Jerusalem, going up in flames as it is destroyed by enemy hands. Behind Jeremiah is a giant pillar – perhaps a vestige of the Temple. Visible in the left background are an arched building, burning torches, an approaching army, and a man running as he covers his eyes. This is probably Zedekiah, the last king of Judea, who has been blinded by the Babylonian soldiers. The silver and gold vessels in the painting are not mentioned in the original biblical story, yet later traditions ( Josephus Flavius and others) recount that Nebuchadnezzar's captain of the guard, Nebuzaradan, treated Jeremiah compassionately and invited him to come to Babylon; when he refused, they left him the objects from the Temple (perhaps so that he could sell them in a time of need). Incidentally, a year later Rembrandt once again depicted the exact same model (an anonymous old man from Leiden? The artist's father?) in the same pose, seated on the floor, in the painting St. Peter in Prison (today in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem).

In Matan Ben Cnaan's painting, which is devoted to the same exact subject, there is no trace of any of the details appearing in Rembrandt's composition. His "Jeremiah" appears much younger, a contemporary man (as in all of Ben Cnaan's biblical paintings) with a hoe at his side, and it remains unclear whether he is not simply a ( Jewish or Arab) worker taking a momentary pause in the midst of his backbreaking work.

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