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Editorial Office 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904
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Principal Contributor
Imre Tokics

Editor
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Associate Editor
Soraya Homayouni

Publication Manager
Lea Alexander Greve

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Sharon Thomas-Crews

Pacific Press® Coordinator
Wendy Marcum

Art Director and Illustrator
Lars Justinen

Design
Justinen Creative Group

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Mi-Yittan

Biblical Hebrew, like most languages, is sprinkled with idioms, words, or phrases that mean something different from what they immediately say. An example is *mi-yittan*, which is composed of two Hebrew words: *mi*, which is the interrogative “who?”; and *yittan*, which means “will give.” Thus, we have “who will give?”

In the Hebrew Bible, this phrase expresses the idea of a wish, of a desire, of someone wanting something badly. For instance, after their escape from Egypt, the children of Israel, facing challenges in the wilderness, exclaimed, “‘If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt!’” (*Exod. 16:3, NIV*). The phrase “if only” came from *mi-yittan*. In Psalm 14:7, David utters, “Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!” The Hebrew doesn’t say, “Oh”; it says, *mi-yittan*. In Job 6:8, when Job exclaims, “‘Oh, that I might have my request’” (*NIV*), “Oh” is from *mi-yittan*.

Another occurrence appears, this time in Deuteronomy 5:29. Going over the history of God’s providences, Moses reminds the children of Israel about their request that he, Moses, talk to the Lord for them, lest they die. According to Moses, the Lord, pleased with their request, then said: “Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would hear Me and always keep all My commandments” (*NKJV*).

The word translated “Oh”? Yes, it is *mi-yittan*.

Incredible! Here is the Lord—the Creator God, the One who made space, time, and matter, the One who spoke our world into existence, the One who breathed into

Adam the breath of life—uttering a phrase generally associated with the weaknesses and limitations of humanity.

Talk about the reality of free will. Talk about the limits of what God can do in the midst of the great controversy. This use of *mi-yittan* reveals that even God won't trample on free will (because the moment He did, it would no longer be free).

Now, if ever one book of the Old Testament revealed the reality of God's desire for humans to obey Him, and the human tendency not to, it would be the book of Jeremiah, the topic of this quarter. Set against the background of great geopolitical changes in the ancient Near East, the book of Jeremiah recounts the ministry and message of the prophet as he, with passion and faithfulness, preached God's message to a people who, for the most part, didn't want to hear it.

Starting with the prophet's call, the book takes us through decades of biblical history as the Lord used this young (and then old) man to proclaim the basic truths that have been the foundation of the biblical message from the beginning. And of all the spiritual truths taught in the book, these words catch the essence of so much of what the Lord seeks from His people: "Thus says the LORD: 'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD'" (*Jer. 9:23, 24, ESV*).

To read the book of Jeremiah is to take a journey, a spiritual journey that goes back and forth from the lowest depths of human depravity to the heights and grandeur and majesty of the Lord—the Lord who, from those heights, cries out to all of us: *Mi-yittan that such a heart would be in you!*

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Imre Tokics, PhD, is the head of the Old Testament Department at the Adventist Theological College, Pecel, Hungary. He is a professor of Old Testament and Jewish religious sciences, and also has a doctor of law (LLD) degree.



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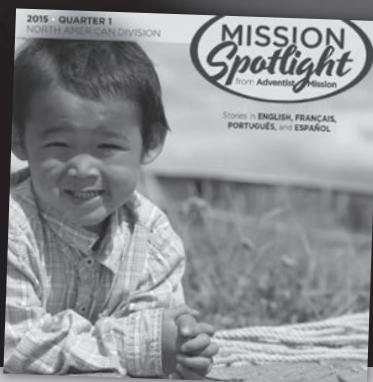


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