

# Haftarah Helper 5781: Devarim-Hazon

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This is the final of the “Three [Haftarot] of Affliction” (Aramaic: תלת דפורענותא), describing the destruction of Judah, Jerusalem, and the First Temple in 586 BCE. They are recited on consecutive Shabbatot of the “Three Weeks”, between the fasts of the 17th of Tammuz and Tisha B’Av. Ashkenazi communities chant it with the traditional, mournful melody of Lamentations due to its structure, content, and the word “אֵיכָה” in verse 21.

## Isaiah 1:1-27

The book of Isaiah’s opening prophecy presents his “Hazon”, or vision for society in God’s Land. Centered on God’s Temple in His holy city, His people exist to embody His righteousness and His sanctity -in that order- for humanity. Divine mercy gives them time to achieve God’s goal but failure will eventually cause Divine justice to destroy them, exiling survivors until they repent to deserve redemption. Divine justice permitted the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, to destroy and exile the unjust, idolatrous Northern Kingdom, ca. 720 BCE. The Haftarah’s unflinching portrait of a destroyed Judah alongside an unconquered Jerusalem matches the aftermath of Sennacherib’s failed siege of Jerusalem decades later, ca. 701 BCE; Divine justice continues on its path.

Isaiah laments that God’s vision is unfulfilled and witheringly condemns Judah’s failures. It does not recognize God as its master and sustainer. The resulting greed creates economic and political corruption, and even murder. These create further injustice, as the powerful neglect the vulnerable. Not grasping that societal righteousness, like ritual purity, must precede pursuit of Divine sanctity at the Temple, the people worship God there, but God is repulsed. Judah must reverse its injustices so that Jerusalem can again be a “City of Righteousness”, and Northern Kingdom exiles can return. Failing this, Jerusalem’s destruction is inevitable.

## Haftarah Breakdown

Verse 1: Isaiah prophesies about Judah during the reign of four kings.

Isaiah 1:1	ישעיהו א:א
The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, [and] Hezekiah, kings of Judah.	חִזְוֹן יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ בֶן-אֲמוֹץ אֲשֶׁר חָזָה עַל-יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם בְּיָמֵי עֲזַרְיָהוּ יוֹתָם אֲחָז יְחִזְקִיָּהוּ מְלָכֵי יְהוּדָה:

Verses 2-4: Like a father, God reared generations of Judeans. Ignorantly, they rebel against God’s authority and sanctity, angering Him by denying that He is the Master who provides for them.

Isaiah 1:3	ישעיהו א:ג
An ox knows its owner and a donkey, its master's [feeding] trough. [Yet] Israel does not know, My people do not consider.	יָדַע שׁוֹר קִנְיָהּ וְחֲמֹר אֲכֹס בְּעֻלּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יָדַע עַמִּי לֹא הִתְבּוֹנֵן:

Verses 5-9: Like Sodom and Gomorrah, God has brutally punished Judah for its sins, leaving it beaten and bloody. Judah watches foreigners destroy and consume its land. Only God’s mercy spared Jerusalem and a few survivors.

Isaiah 1:9	ישעיהו א:ט
Had not the Lord of Hosts left us a small remnant, we would have been like Sodom; we would resemble Gomorrah.	לֹאִי הָיָה צָבָקוֹת הוֹתִיר לָנוּ עָרִיד כְּמַעַט כְּסֻדָם הָיִינוּ לְעַמָּה דְּמִינוּ:

Verses 10-15: Judah and its leaders serve God with devotion at the Temple and on holy days. God scathingly rejects them and their service as abominations because of their sins and blood-stained hands.

Isaiah 1:13	ישעיהו א:י"ג
Bring no more pointless grain offerings; incense of abomination are they to Me. [New] moons, sabbaths, and calling of assemblies - I cannot bear iniquity along with solemn gatherings.	לֹא תוֹסִיפוּ הִבִּיאַ מִנְחֹת־שָׁוְא קִטְרֹת תִּנְעֻמָּה הִיא לִי חֲדָשׁ וְשַׁבָּת קָרָא מִקְרָא לֹא־אוּכַל אֲנִי וְעֹצְרָה:

Verses 16-17: To find favor in God's eyes, Judah must cleanse itself by replacing its societal evils with justice. It must reform its evildoers, and ensure justice for their vulnerable victims.

Isaiah 1:17	ישעיהו א:י"ז
Learn to do well! Seek judgment! Relieve the oppressed! Judge the fatherless! Plead for the widow!	לִמְדוּ הַיָּטֵב דְּרָשׁוּ מִשְׁפָּט אֲשֶׁרוֹ הַמּוֹץ שְׁפֹטוּ יְתוֹם רִיבוֹ אֶלְמָנָה: (ט)

Verses 18-20: God reminds Judah that if they turn from evil to good, He will forgive even their bloody sins and again sustain them in the Land. Otherwise, He will bring further war to destroy them.

Isaiah 1:19	ישעיהו א:י"ח
If you are willing and obey [Me], you shall eat the Land's goodness.	אם־תֵּאָבֱדוּ וְשָׁמַעְתֶּם טוֹב הָאָרֶץ תֹּאכְלוּ:

Verses 21-23: Isaiah laments Jerusalem's condition. Instead of embodying God's justice and righteousness, its political, judicial, and commercial elites are greedy and corrupt; they neglect and abuse society's vulnerable.

Isaiah 1:23	ישעיהו א:כ"ג
Your princes are rebellious and companions of thieves - [all are] bribe lovers and pursuers of payments! The orphan they do not judge; the widow's dispute does not reach them.	שְׂרָיֶה סוֹרְרִים וְחֻבְרֵי גַנָּבִים כָּלֹץ אֶהָב שֹׁחַד וְרֵדָף שְׁלֵמָנִים יְתוֹם לֹא יִשְׁפֹּטוּ וְרִיב אֶלְמָנָה לֹא־יָבוֹא אֲלֵיהֶם: (פ)

Verses 24-27: In this state, Judah is God's enemy and He will powerfully punish it. God will then install new leaders so that Jerusalem, and the exiles who return there, will again embody His justice and righteousness.

Isaiah 1:26	ישעיהו א:כ"ו
I [God] will restore your judges as at first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward, you shall be called City of Righteousness, Faithful City.	וְאֶשְׁיבָה שְׁפָטֶיךָ כְּבָרְאשׁוֹנָה וְיַעֲצֶיךָ כְּבִתְחִלָּה אַחֲרֵי־כֵן יִקְרָא לְךָ עִיר הַצֶּדֶק קִרְיַת נְאֻמָּה:

## Connections

The **eleventh blessing of the daily Amidah** asks God to fulfill His promise in v. 26, above.

Weekday Shacharit, Amidah	שחרית לימי החול, עמידה
Restore our judges as at first, and our counselors as at the beginning, and remove sorrow and sighing from us...	הַשִּׁיבָה שְׁוֹפְטֵינוּ כְּבָרְאשׁוֹנָה, וְיוֹעֲצֵינוּ כְּבִתְחִלָּה, וְהַסֵּר מִמֶּנּוּ יְגוֹן וְאַנְחָה...

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