

Haftarah Helper: Eikev

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Unrelated to the weekly Parashiyot, Seven “Haftarot of Comfort” (Aramaic: שבע דנהמתא) from Isaiah, chapters 40 & ff, are recited after Tisha B’av until Rosh Hashanah. They follow Three “Haftarot of Punishment” describing the people breaking of the covenant, and as Tisha B’av described and lamented the resulting destruction and exile. With increasing intensity, these seven Haftarot describe the redemptive renewal of the covenant between God, His exiled people, His Land, and all humanity. This week is the second of these seven Haftarot.

Isaiah 49:14-51:3

God’s people are despairing during the long Babylonian exile. They think exile means that God has terminated His covenant with them, so they reject and even abuse His prophet and his efforts to return them to God. Isaiah poetically amplifies their despair in the person of a “woman”- the Land, Zion, bereft of her “children” (the Jewish people) whose will not return. Isaiah responds by affirming that God’s help and word strengthen him against his opponent’s attacks, which do not deter him. Moreover, exiles who decide to reject the covenant will slowly wither away in exile. In contrast, God’s power will utterly reverse the condition of the few faithful exiles who trust that their woes are punishment for sin in the context of God’s ongoing covenant. Instead of continuing to oppress them, their captors will escort them back to the Land, Zion; eventually, God will also punish their oppressors. Unaware that the exiles rush to her, their arrival will “astonish” and “comfort” Zion- she won’t even recognize them. Just as God turned Abraham and Sarah into an entire nation, God will then multiply the handful of returnees until they overflow and rebuild Zion’s ruins, transforming the entire Land into a joyful Garden of Eden.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 49:14-16: “Her” children long ago exiled, Zion “thinks” that God has abandoned and forgotten her. God reassures her that, just as a mother never forgets her children, He has not forgotten her; she is forever before Him.

Isaiah 49:16	ישעיהו מ"ט:ט"ז
Behold I [God] have engraved you [Zion] upon the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before me.	הֵן עַל־כַּפַּיִם חֲקוּתִיךָ חוֹמֹתֶיךָ נִגְדִי תָמִיד:

Verses 49:17-23: God gives Zion hope: her invaders are departing. Foreign royalty will submissively escort exiled Jews to her. These “children,” whom Zion does not know, are hurrying, and will soon overflow her desolate places.

Isaiah 49:21	ישעיהו מ"ט:כ"א
You [Zion] shall say to yourself, “Who bore me these? I am bereft of my children and alone - an exile, a wanderer to and fro! Who reared these? Behold, I was left alone; these - where are they [from]?”	וְאָמַרְתְּ בְלִבְבְּךָ מִי גִלְדֵּלִי אֶת־אֵלֶּה וְאֲנִי שְׂכֻלָּה וְגִלְמוּנָה גִלָּהּ וְסוּרָה וְאֵלֶּה מִי גִלְדֵּל הֵן אֲנִי נִשְׁאַרְתִּי לְבַדִּי אֵלֶּה אֵיפָה הֵם:

Verses 49:24-26: Zion is incredulous of God’s extravagant promises. God replies that not only will He redeem His captive people from amidst mighty nations, He will also later destroy those nations.

Isaiah 49:25	ישעיהו מ"ט:כ"ה
Thus says the Lord, “Even the mighty one’s captives shall be seized, and the tyrant’s prey be delivered. I will contend with him that contends with you [Zion], and I will save your children.”	כִּי־כֹה אָמַר ה' גַּם־שָׁבִי גְבוּרֵ יִלְחָם וּמַלְכוּת עָרִיץ יִמְלֹט וְאֶת־יְרִיבֶךָ אֶנְכִּי אֲרִיב וְאֶת־בְּנֶיךָ אֶנְכִּי אוֹשִׁיעַ:

Verses 50:1-3: Exiled Jews say that God has permanently terminated His covenant with them and the Land, but He has not; exile is mere punishment for sin. God will even overturn nature to redeem exiles who answer His call.

Isaiah 50:1	ישעיהו נ:א
Thus says the Lord, "Where is your [Israel's] mother's [the Land's] divorce document I sent her away with? To which of My [imagined] 'creditors' did I sell you? Lo- you were sold [exiled] for your iniquities, and your mother was sent away for your transgressions."	כֹּה אָמַר ה' אֵיזָה סֵפֶר כְּרִיתוֹת אִמְכֶם אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַחְתִּיהָ אוֹ מִי מְנוּשֵׁי אֲשֶׁר־מְכַרְתִּי אֹתְכֶם לֹא הֵן בְּעוֹנֹתֵיכֶם נִמְכַּרְתֶּם וּבִפְשָׁעֵיכֶם שְׁלַחְתָּה אִמְכֶם:

Verses 50:4-7: Isaiah proclaims God's word with His help, not flinching in his Divine mission despite attackers.

Isaiah 50:6	ישעיהו נ:ד
I [Isaiah] gave my back to those who hit, and my cheeks to those who pluck [hair]. I did not hide my face from shame and spitting.	גוֹי נָתַתִּי לַמִּכָּים וּלְחֹזֵי לְמַרְטָיִם פָּנַי לֹא הִסְתַּרְתִּי מִכְּלָמוֹת וָרֶק:

Verses 50:8-11: Isaiah scoffs at those who reject his pleas to trust God, who will give them misery. By contrast, God will redeem exiles who, despite woes, heed the promises of His servant, Isaiah.

Isaiah 50:10	ישעיהו נ:י
Who among you [exiles] fears the Lord, obeying the voice of His servant; walking in darkness, and has no light? Let him trust in the Lord's name, and rely upon his God.	מִי בְכֶם יִרְאֶה ה' שְׁמַע בְּקוֹל עַבְדּוֹ אֲשֶׁר הִלֵּךְ חֹשֶׁכִּים וְאֵין נֹגֵה לֹא יִבְטַח בְּיָשָׁם ה' וַיִּשָּׁעַן בְּאֵלֵיקוֹ:

Verses 51:1-3: As He did for Abraham and Sarah, God will again fulfill His promise to multiply the descendants of His few, loyal followers. God will also transform the desolate Zion into a Garden of Eden, filled with joy and song.

Isaiah 51:2	ישעיהו נ"א:ב
Look to Abraham your father and at Sarah that bore you: For he was but one when I called him, and I blessed him, and increased him.	הִבִּיטוּ אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אֲבִיכֶם וְאֶל־סָרָה תְּחוּלְלֵיכֶם כִּי־אֶחָד קָרָאתִיו וְאַבְרָכָהוּ וַאֲרַבְּהוּ:

Connections

The Talmud brings to life the **debate about exile's meaning**: termination of covenant, or punishment for sin?

Sanhedrin 105a	סנהדרין ק"ה עמוד א
Ten people came and sat before [the prophet]. He said to them, "Repent." They replied, "A slave sold by his owner, or a woman divorced by her husband - does one have any claim upon the other?!" The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to the prophet: "Go say to them, 'Where is your mother's divorce document I sent her away with? To which of My "creditors" did I sell you? Lo- you were sold [exiled] for your iniquities, and your mother was sent away for your transgressions.'" (Isaiah 50:1)	באו עשרה בני אדם וישבו לפניו אמר להן חזרו בתשובה אמרו לו עבד שמכרו רבו ואשה שגרשה בעלה כלום יש לזה על זה כלום? אמר לו הקב"ה לנביא לך אמור להן (ישעיהו נ, א) איזה ספר כריתות אמכם אשר שלחתיה או מי מנושי אשר מכרתי אתכם לו הן בעונותיכם נמכרתם ובפשעכם שלחה אמכם

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