

Haftarah Helper: Re'eh

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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; Tisha B’av then described and lamented the resulting destruction and exile. With increasing intensity, these seven Haftarat describe the redemptive renewal of the covenant between God, His exiled people, His Land, and all humanity. This week is the third of these seven Haftarat.

Isaiah 54:11-55:5

In the past two Haftarat, God and Isaiah comforted Jerusalem and “her” despairing “children”, the Jews exiled in Babylon. Caused by their sins in the context of the ongoing covenant with God, their exilic woes are temporary, and will be utterly reversed. God will soon redeem the exiles loyal to the covenant. Their oppressors, whom God will later punish, will escort them to the Land. He will multiply them upon arrival, utterly transforming the Land.

Nonetheless, this Haftarah portrays the exiles and Jerusalem as still distraught. Isaiah offers new promises and visions. Jerusalem will be rebuilt with splendor and dazzling jewels. The returned exiles - her inhabitants and rebuilders - will know God. Living in tranquility, they will establish Jerusalem with righteousness and without oppression. As Creator and Redeemer, God can and will protect the renewed city of His righteous servants from every military or diplomatic attack. To the exiles disregarding God’s promises and paying for physical and spiritual satisfaction elsewhere, Isaiah replies that God’s promises are free and as eternal as His promises to King David. Led by David’s restored royal house, Israel will dominate all nations and reflect God’s glory; nations will run to Israel to know God.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 54:11-14: Jerusalem is afflicted and not comforted. In response, God promises to restore “her” physical splendor. He also promises that her inhabitants will be righteous, live in peace, know God, and rebuild her.

Isaiah 54:11	ישעיהו ב"ד:יא
O afflicted, storm-tossed one who is not comforted! Behold, I will lay your stones with fair colors ¹ and your foundations with sapphires.	עֲנִיָּה סַעֲרָה לֹא נִחְמָה הַנָּה אֲנֹכִי מֵרַבִּיץ בַּפֹּהַד אֲבִנֶיךָ וְיִסְדְּתֶיךָ בַּסַּפִּירִים:

Verses 54:15-17: As Creator of weapons and armies, God further reassures Jerusalem that He will reward her righteous residents by not allowing His creations to defeat them at battle or attack her with words.

Isaiah 54:17	ישעיהו ב"ד:יז
“Any weapon forged against you shall not succeed, and any tongue that will contend with you in judgment, you shall defeat. This is the Lord’s servants’ heritage Lord and their reward from Me,” says the Lord.	כֹּל-כֶּלֶי יוֹצֵר עֲלֶיךָ לֹא יִצְלַח וְכָל-לְשׁוֹן תְּקוּם-אֲתָךְ לְמִשְׁפַּט תִּרְשָׁעֵי זֵאת נִחְלַת עֲבָדֶי ה' וְצַדִּיקְתֶּם מֵאֵתִי נְאֻם-ה' (ס)

¹ The identity of the stone mentioned is unclear. The translation is an approximation.

Verses 55:1-2: Some exiles spend money to get imagined physical or spiritual satiety. Isaiah's words are free, and heeding them provides satisfaction...

Isaiah 55:2	ישעיהו נ"ה:ב
Why do you spend money without (getting) bread, your labor for no satisfaction? Listen diligently to me and consume goodness - let your soul delight itself in fatness!	לָמָּה תִשְׁקַלְוּ-כֶסֶף בְּלֹא-לֶחֶם וַיִּגְיַעְכֶּם בְּלֹא לִשְׂבַעַה שְׂמֵעוּ שְׂמוֹעַ אֵלַי וְאֶכְלוּ-טוֹב וְתִתְעַבְּגוּ בְדָשׁוֹן בְּפִשְׁתֵּיכֶם:

Verses 55:3-5: ... that will be eternal, just like God's promises to the House of David. God's glorification of Israel and David's dominance over all nations will cause them to come to Jerusalem to find Him.

Isaiah 55:3	ישעיהו נ"ה:ג
Incline your ear and come to me; listen so your soul shall live. I will [then] make an eternal covenant with you [like My] trustworthy kindnesses [to] David.	הִטּוּ אָזְנוֹכֶם וּלְכוּ אֵלַי שְׂמֵעוּ וַתְּחִי נַפְשְׁכֶם וְאֶכְרַתֶּה לְכֶם בְּרִית עוֹלָם חֲסִדֵי דָוִד הַנְּאֻמָּנִים:

Connections

Tractate Berachot concludes with an **ode to peace**, beginning with an re-reading of 54:13. The complete ode appears in the siddur several times.

Berakhot 64a	ברכות ס"ד עמוד א
Rabbi Elazar said that Rabbi Hanina said: "Torah scholars increase peace in the world, as it is said: 'And all your children [banayikh] shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children' (Isaiah 54:13). [Interpret this verse homiletically:] Do not pronounce this as 'your children [banayikh],' but as 'your builders [bonayikh].'"	אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר אָמַר רַבִּי חַנִּינָא: תְּלַמְדֵי חֲכָמִים מְרַבִּים שְׁלוֹם בְּעוֹלָם, שְׁנַאֲמַר: "וְכָל בְּנֵיךָ לְמוֹדֵי ה' וְרַב שְׁלוֹם בְּנֵיךָ". אֵל תִּקְרִי "בְּנֵיךָ" אֶלָּא "בּוֹנֵיךָ".

Da'at Mikra (Isa. 49:17) points out the **Hebrew letter 'vav'** appears above and between the letters 'bet' and 'nun' in the final word of 54:13 of the "[Great Isaiah Scroll](#)" found at Qumran near the Dead Sea:

This corresponds to the Talmud's "alternate" reading, above, of the Bible's word בְּנֵיךָ (your "sons/children") as בּוֹנֵיךָ (your "builders"). This, in turn, suggests the following reading of 54:13-14:

[Because] all 'your' [rebuilt Jerusalem's] 'children' [i.e., returned exiles living there] are instructed by God, your builders will have great peace. [Why will they have great peace? Because] you shall be founded in righteousness, distancing yourself from oppression [of your builders/sons who, in turn, are righteous enough to work honestly with valuable gems to rebuild you] fearlessly.

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