

Haftarah Helper: Shoftim

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Unrelated to the weekly Parashiyot, Seven “Haftarot of Comfort” (Aramaic: שבע דנחמתא) from Isaiah, chapters 40 and onwards, 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.

Isaiah 51:12-52:12

This week’s fourth Haftarah of Comfort reverses its predecessors’ orderly progression through Isaiah’s chapters (40, 48, 54) to convey a dramatically different tone and message.¹ The sins and protests of Jerusalem and the exiles, and the prophet’s words and woes, fade away; God’s words and actions take center stage. With astonishing anthropomorphism, God takes responsibility for the exiles’ misery that has knocked them, like a drunkard, to the ground. Their exile has also made humanity think God is too weak to save them. God repeatedly rouses a royal Israel from their stupor, promising them that their punishment is over even as their captors’ punishment begins. “Visibly” accompanying them from exile to a rebuilt Zion, God will lead them home calmly. Jubilation and international recognition of God’s power will herald their arrival.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 51:12-16: The exiles constantly fear their oppressor. They have forgotten that God is the powerful Creator who will protect His people from mere mortals. As bearers of God’s word, they should fear no one.

Isaiah 51:16	ישעיהו נ"א:ט"ז
I placed My words into your mouth, and covered you with My hand’s shadow. [I] affixed the heavens and founded the earth [in order to] say to Zion, “You are My people.”	וְאֲשִׁים דְּבָרִי בְּפִיָּהּ וּבִצֵּל יְדֵי כְסִיתִיהָ לְנֹטֵעַ שְׁמַיִם וְלִיסֹד אֶרֶץ וְלֵאמֹר לְצִיּוֹן עַמִּי־אַתָּה: (ס)

Verses 51:17-20: The fury the exiles suffered was in fact God brutally punishing them and Zion for their sins. They slumber from “drinking” this Divine cup of poison, so God awakens them.

Isaiah 51:17	ישעיהו נ"א:י"ז
Awaken, awaken, arise, Jerusalem! You have drunk from the Lord’s hand a cup of His wrath - you have drunk and drained the poisoned cup.	הִתְעוֹרְרִי הִתְעוֹרְרִי קוּמִי יְרוּשָׁלַם אֲשֶׁר שָׁתִית מִיַּד ה' אֶת־כּוֹס חֲמָתוֹ אֶת־קַבְלֶעֶת כּוֹס הַתַּרְעֵלָה שָׁתִית מִצִּית:

Verses 51:21-23: Jerusalem and her suffering exiles lie in a “drunken stupor”. God again awakens them - He is on their side! He will never again punish them; only their enemies will drink the cup of God’s fury.

Isaiah 51:22	ישעיהו נ"א:כ"ב
Thus says Your Master, the Lord, the God who contends for His people, "Behold, I have taken the poisoned cup from your hand. The cup of My wrath- you shall never again drink it."	כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָיָהּ ה' וְאֵלֶיכֶם יָרִיב עִמּוֹ הִנֵּה לְקַחְתִּי מִיָּדְךָ אֶת־כּוֹס הַתַּרְעֵלָה אֶת־קַבְלֶעֶת כּוֹס חֲמָתִי לֹא־תוֹסִיפִי לְשָׁתוּתָהּ עוֹד:

¹ [Machzor Vitry](#) (11th C., France) and [Abudarham](#) (14th C., Spain) also note this Haftarah’s sharp break from its predecessors.

Verses 52:1-4: God awakens Jerusalem; her invaders shall never return. Freed from captivity, the exiles owe their oppressors nothing. Zion must arise, don her finest, and sit on her royal throne.

Isaiah 52:2	ישעיהו נ"ב:ב
Shake yourself from the dust! Arise [and then] sit, Jerusalem! Loosen your neck bands, O captive daughter of Zion!	הַתְנַעֲרִי מֵעָפָר קוֹמִי שְׁבִי יְרוּשָׁלַם הַתְּפַתְחוּ מוֹסְרֵי צִנְאוֹתָי שְׁבִיָּהּ בַּת־צִיּוֹן: (ס)

Verses 52:5-6: The Babylonian exile makes nations scorn God as weak, exiled, and unable to save His People. Therefore, God must “return” to Jerusalem with His people.

Isaiah 52:6	ישעיהו נ"ב:ב
“Now why am I here?” says the Lord. “My people have been taken away for nought. Their rulers howl,” says the Lord, “and My name is blasphemed continually every day!”	וְעַתָּה מִה־לִּי פֹה נְאֻם־ה' כִּי־לָקַח עַמִּי חֲנָם מִשָּׁלוֹן יְהִלִּיל נְאֻם־יְהוָה וְתָמִיד כָּל־הַיּוֹם שְׁמִי מִנְאָץ:

Verses 52:7-10: God’s “visible” return to Zion with His redeemed people will truly comfort them. The rebuilding of Jerusalem will be met with jubilation, demonstrating His power to all nations.

Isaiah 52:9	ישעיהו נ"ב:ט
Burst out in song, sing together, O ruins of Jerusalem! For the Lord has comforted His people - He has redeemed Jerusalem!	פָּצְחוּ רִנְנוּ יַחְדָּו תְּרַבּוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם כִּי־נָחַם ה' עַמּוֹ גָּאֹל יְרוּשָׁלַם:

Verses 52:11-12: The exiles must purify themselves and promptly depart Babylon. Unlike the rushed Exodus, this departure will be calm. God will both lead and guard them.

Isaiah 52:12	ישעיהו נ"ב:י"ב
You shall not depart in haste nor leave in flight, for the Lord goes before you, and your rear guard is Israel’s God!	כִּי לֹא בְחֻצּוֹן תֵּצְאוּ וּבְמִנוּסָה לֹא תִלְכוּן כִּי־יֵהְיֶה לְפָנֵיכֶם ה' וּמֵאַסְפֵּכֶם אֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Connections

Multiple stanzas of “**Lekha Dodi**”, the poem sung at the beginning of Shabbat, echo verses 51:17, and 52:1-2 of the Haftarah.

Lekha Dodi 5-6	לְכֵה דוּדִי, הִוֵּה
Shake yourself, arise from the dust / Dress in your garments of splendor , my people! / By the hand of Jesse’s son of Bethlehem / Draw near to my soul and redeem it!	הַתְנַעֲרִי מֵעָפָר קוֹמִי/לְבָשִׁי בְּגָדֵי תִפְאָרֶת עַמִּי/עַל יַד בֶּן יִשִּׁי בֵּית הַלֶּחֶמִי/קְרִבָה אֶל נַפְשִׁי גָאֹלָה
Arouse yourself, arouse yourself! / For your light has come ² - arise, my light! / Awaken, awaken , utter a song! / The glory of the Lord is revealed upon you.	הַתְעוֹרְרִי הַתְעוֹרְרִי/כִּי בָא אוֹרְךָ קוֹמִי אוֹרִי/עוֹרִי עוֹרִי שִׁיר דְּבָרִי/כְבוֹד ה' עָלֶיךָ נִגְלָה

With emendations, all translations are from Sefaria.org. To dedicate, comment, or subscribe, email haftarahhelper@gmail.com.

² “Your light has come” is the opening phrase of Isaiah 60:1. It begins the sixth Haftarah of Comfort, read with [Parashat Ki Tavo](#) two weeks from now.