

Haftarah Helper: Ki Teitzei

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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 Haftarot describe the redemptive renewal of the covenant between God, His exiled people, His Land, and all humanity.

Isaiah 54:1-10

In last week’s fourth Haftarah of Comfort, God took responsibility for His and Israel’s shared exile and suffering, and for ending it by returning with them to Zion in triumphant celebration. This week’s fifth Haftarah of Comfort resumes moving forward through Isaiah’s chapters, returning to the text (54:1-10) just preceding the third Haftarah which began at 54:11.

Isaiah continues his imagery of God as “husband”, Zion as “wife”, and Israel as their “children.” The exiled “children” and their barren, abandoned “mother”, Zion, recognize and are ashamed of their sins, even fearing this will prevent God from redeeming them. God sweeps away their concerns. They must forget their earlier sins which caused their harsh but brief exile. By contrast, God’s merciful love and covenantal loyalty to His “first loves” - Jerusalem and the Jewish people - and their welfare are eternal. Let them burst into song! The returning exiles will outnumber the earlier population of Jerusalem which, in turn, will be restored and rebuilt even larger than its previous size.

Haftarah Breakdown

Versed 54:1-3: Zion will rejoice as her children return from exile. They will be more numerous than before. As occupiers depart and ruins are rebuilt, Zion must greatly expand to create enough space for the returnees to live.

Isaiah 54:1	ישעיהו נ"ד:א
“Sing, O barren one who has borne [no child]! Break out into song and rejoice, you who did not travail! For the children of the destroyed wife [present Zion] shall be more numerous than those of the espoused wife [past Zion],” said the Lord.	רְגַי עָקְרָה לֹא יִלְדָה פִּצְחֵי רִגְהָ וְצַחֲלֵי לֹא־תִקְלָה כִּי־רַבִּים בְּנֵי־שׁוֹמְמָה מִבְּנֵי בְעוּלָה אָמַר ה':

Verses 54:4-5: The exiles are ashamed of their past sins and fear that God will not redeem them. Their loyal “husband”, God, assures them the opposite is true: humanity will recognize that the Creator redeemed them.

Isaiah 54:4	ישעיהו נ"ד:ד
Fear not, for you shall not be ashamed; be not embarrassed, for you shall not be put to shame. You shall forget the shame of your youth, and no longer remember your widowhood’s disgrace.	אַל־תִּירָאֵל כִּי־לֹא תְבוֹשִׁי וְאַל־תִּכְלָמִי כִּי לֹא תִחְפְּרִי כִּי בָשָׁת עַל־וַיְמִיךְ תִּשְׁכַּחֵי וְחַרְפַּת אֱלֻמְנוּתֶיךָ לֹא תִזְכְּרִי־עוֹד:

Verses 6-8: The Jewish people are God's "first love." Angry at their abandoning Him, God briefly exiled them. But God's eternal love and kindness will cause Him to redeem them.

Isaiah 54:8	ישעיהו נ"ד:ח
"In slight ¹ anger, for a moment, I hid My face from you - but with eternal kindness I will have mercy upon you," said your Redeemer, the Lord.	בְּשִׂטְפוֹת קָצָף הִסְתַּרְתִּי פָנַי רְגַע מִמֶּךָ וּבְחַסְדְּךָ עוֹלָם רַחֲמֵיךָ אֲמַר גְּאֻלְךָ ה'

Verses 9-10: In His Mercy, God swears never again to so harshly punish His people. Like the mountains and His oath after the Flood with Noah', God's covenant of peace is eternal.

Isaiah 54:10	ישעיהו נ"ד:י
"For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my faithful love shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, says the Lord that has mercy on thee.	כִּי הַהָרִים יִמְּוָשׁוּ וְהַגְּבָעוֹת תִּמְוִטְינָהּ וְחַסְדִּי מֵאַתָּה לֹא-יִמְּוָשׁ וּבְרִית שְׁלוֹמִי לֹא תִמְוָט אֲמַר מֶרְחֶמֶךָ ה':

Connections

Verse 3 and verse 4 (above) are sources of **stanzas of Lekha Dodi**, sung to welcome each Shabbat.

Lekha Dodi 7, 9	לכה דודי ז', ט'
(7) Don't be ashamed! Don't be embarrassed! / Why are you depressed? Why are you upset? / In you [Zion], the poor of My people shall be sheltered / The city shall be rebuilt on her hill!	לֹא תִבְשִׂי וְלֹא תִכְלָמִי / מַה תִּשְׁתַּחֲוִי וּמַה תִּתְקַמֵּי / בָּךְ יִחְסוּ עַנְיֵי עַמִּי / וּנְבִנְתָה עִיר עַל תְּלָהּ
(9) Spread out to the right and left! / You shall venerate God / Through a descendant of Peretz / So let us rejoice and sing!	יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאל תִּפְרָצִי / וְאֵת ה' תִּעְרִיצִי / עַל יַד אִישׁ בֶּן פְּרָצִי / וּנְשַׂמְחָה וְנִגְלֶהּ

Berurya, wife of the Tanna, Rabbi Meir, sharply disputes a heretic's interpretation of **the Haftarah's opening verse**:

Berakhot 10a	ברכות י עמוד א
A certain heretic said to Berurya: "It is written, 'Sing, O barren one who has borne [no child]!...' Because she has not given birth, she should sing and rejoice?" She replied to him: "Fool! Go to the verse's end where it is written, '...For the children of the destroyed wife [present Zion] shall be more numerous than those of the espoused wife [past Zion], says the Lord.' [She continued:] "Then what does, 'Sing, O barren one who has borne [no child]!...' mean? [It means:] 'Sing, O Congregation of Israel, which is like a barren woman who did not birth children who are destined for Gehenna like you [heretics]!"	אָמַר לָהּ הַהוּא מֵינָא לְבַרְוִרְיָא: פְּתִיב "רְנִי עֲקָרָה לֹא יִלְדָה", מִשּׁוּם דְּלֹא יִלְדָה — רְנִי? אָמְרָה לִיהּ: שְׂטָנָא, שְׂפִיל לְסִיפִיה דְקָרָא, דְּכַתִּיב: "כִּי רַבִּים בְּנֵי שׁוֹמְמָה מִבְּנֵי בְעוּלָה אָמַר ה'." אֱלָא מַאי "עֲקָרָה לֹא יִלְדָה" — רְנִי בְּנִסְתַּי שְׂרָאֵל שְׁדוּמָה לְאַשָׁה עֲקָרָה שְׁלֵא יִלְדָה בְּנִים לְגִיהֵנָם כְּתוּבִיכוּ.

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

¹ שִׂטְפוֹת appears only here, where it rhymes with the word following it, גְּאֻלְךָ. Its meaning and translation are uncertain.