



Noach: Isaiah 54:1-55:5¹

A broad narrative of destruction, redemption, and rebuilding connects this Haftarah to the Parashah. The Haftarah invokes God’s promise to Noah after the flood, as described in the Parashah, as well.

Throughout the Haftarah, Isaiah uses a family to characterize the unbreakable and intimate relationship between God (“husband”), Zion (“wife”/“mother”), and Israel (“children”), which is in exile. The exiles and abandoned Zion are ashamed of their past sins and fear they will prevent God from redeeming them. Isaiah replies that God’s mercy for the “first loves” is eternal. Their renewed covenant will also include eternal peace. Zion and the exiles must therefore forget the sins that caused God to “hide His Face” during their harsh but brief exile. Instead, they must burst into song! Zion’s new children will outnumber her earlier ones and will conquer other nations. They will rebuild Jerusalem and other ruined cities far larger than previously. All humanity will recognize that Israel’s Redeemer is the Creator.

Since these promises do not relieve the exiles’ and Jerusalem’s despair, God offers further promises. Jerusalem will be rebuilt with dazzling jewels. The returned exiles will know God, live tranquilly, and establish Jerusalem without oppression. As Creator and Redeemer, God will protect the renewed city from every military or diplomatic attack. Encouraging those exiles who disregard God’s promises and seek physical and spiritual satisfaction elsewhere, Isaiah states 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 54:1-3: Zion will rejoice as her children, more numerous than before, return from exile. As occupiers depart and her ruins are rebuilt, Zion must greatly expand 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.	רְנִי עֲקָרָה לֹא יָלְדָה פִּצְחוּי רִנָּה וְצַחְלִי לֹא-חֵלָה 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-תִּירָאִי כִּי-לֹא תְבוֹשִׁי וְאַל-תִּכְלָמִי כִּי לֹא תִחְפְּרִי כִּי בָשָׂת עַל-וּמִיּוֹתַי תִּשְׁכַּחַי וְחַרְפַּת אֱלֻמְנוּתִיךָ לֹא תִזְכְּרִי-עוֹד:

Verses 54:6-8: 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 ² 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.	בְּשִׂצְפָה קְצָפָה הִסְתַּרְתִּי פָנַי רִגְעַל מִמֶּךָ וּבְחִסְדֶּךָ עוֹלָם רַחֲמִיּוֹתֶיךָ אָמַר גְּאֻלְךָ ה'

¹ Sephardim read until 54:10

² שִׂצְפָה appears only here, where it rhymes with the word following it, קָצָף. Its meaning and translation are uncertain.

Verses 54:9-10: 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 [God's] faithful love shall not depart from you, and My covenant of peace shall not be removed,” says the Lord, your merciful One.	כִּי הַהָרִים לְמוֹשׁוֹ וְהַגְּבָעוֹת תְּמוּטֵינָהּ וְחֶסְדִּי מֵאַתָּה לֹא-תִמּוֹשׁ וּבְרִית שְׁלוֹמִי לֹא תִמּוֹט אֲמַר מֶרְחֶמֶךָ ה':

Verses 54:11-14: Jerusalem is afflicted and not comforted. God responds by promising 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 נ"ד:יא
O afflicted, storm-tossed one who is not comforted! Behold, I will lay your stones with fair colors and your foundations with sapphires.	עֲנִיָּה סַעֲרָה לֹא נִחְמָה הִנֵּה אֲנִי מֵרַבִּיז בְּפוּף אֲבָנֶיךָ וְיִסְדֵיךָ בְּסַפִּירִים:

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 נ"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.	כָּל-כֶּלֶי יוֹצֵר עֲלֶיךָ לֹא יִצְלַח וְכָל-לְשׁוֹן תְּקוּם-אַתָּה לְמִשְׁפַּט תְּרִשְׁעֵי אֵת נִחַלְתְּ עֲבָדֶי ה' וְצַדִּיקְתֶּם מֵאַתִּי נְאֻם-ה' (ס)

Verses 55:1-5: Some exiles spend money to get imagined physical or spiritual satiety. Yet God's words are free, and heeding them provides satisfaction 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 שְׁמַעוּ וּתְחִי נַפְשְׁכֶם וְאֶכְרַתְהָ לְכֶם בְּרִית עוֹלָם חֶסְדֵי דָוִד הַנְּאֻמָּנִים:

Connections

Pharaoh understood **God's oath to Noah** expansively, but the Talmud favors a far narrower understanding:

Sotah 11a	סוטה י"א א
[Pharaoh and his advisors said,] "Let us come and judge [the babies by drowning them] with water. For the Holy One, Blessed be He, already swore that He will not bring a flood upon the world, as [Isaiah 54:9] states, 'For this is to Me [as] Noah's waters.'" [They] did not know that He will not bring a flood upon all the entire world, but He may bring destruction by water upon one nation. Alternatively, He won't bring [a flood upon them], but they may come and fall [to their deaths in water], as [Exodus 14:27] says, “ The Egyptians fled toward it ”	בואו ונדונם במים שכבר נשבע הקב"ה שאינו מביא מבול לעולם שנאמר (ישעיהו נד, ט) כי מי נח זאת לי וגו' והן אינן יודעין שעל כל העולם כולו אינו מביא אבל על אומה אחת הוא מביא אי נמי הוא אינו מביא אבל הן באין ונופלין בתוכו וכן הוא אומר (שמות יד, כז) ומצרים נסים לקראתו

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