

Lech Lecha: Isaiah 40:27-41:16¹

After the first of the “Seven of Consolation”, “Nachamu”, which this Haftarah immediately follows in the book of Isaiah, Jewish exiles remain skeptical about whether God cares for them at all. God states that since His dominion as Creator extends to the ends of the Earth, He controls human history and will surely redeem them.

To demonstrate that control, Isaiah notes God’s role in bringing a righteous “conqueror” from the East. The conqueror’s identity is disputed. Ibn Ezra and others identify him as Cyrus the Great of Persia, who conquered the ancient Near East and later facilitated the Jews’ return from exile to Zion. Malbim identifies the conqueror as the future Messiah. The Talmud, Rashi, and Radak identify the conqueror as Abraham. Born in Ur (in modern-day Iraq), he and his message of righteousness traveled westward to Canaan, which his descendants later conquered physically.²

Regardless, this conqueror advances God’s plan for humanity, which other nations unify to oppose. God reassures the vulnerable Jewish exiles scattered around the world that He chose them among the nations because they are descendants of Abraham, whom He loves and who loved Him. God will forever support and protect them, and will strengthen them to defeat their enemies. They, in turn, will praise God.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verse 40:27: Exiled Israel despairs that God no longer cares for them. Perhaps He won’t redeem them?

Isaiah 40:27	ישעיהו מ:כ"ז
Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God”?	לָמָּה תֹאמַר יַעֲקֹב וַתְּדַבֵּר יִשְׂרָאֵל נִסְתַּרְהָ דַרְכֵי מֶה' וּמֵאַלְלֵי מִשְׁפָּטַי יַעֲבֹר:

Verses 40:28-31: No! God created the entire Earth, and His power never wanes. God energizes the powerless and those who look to Him. God will easily bring faithful exiles to the Land from afar.

Isaiah 40:31	ישעיהו מ"א
Those who await the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall grow wings as do vultures ³ . They shall run, and not tire. They shall walk, and not faint.	וְקוֹנֵה' יִחַלְּפוּ כַּחַ עֲלֹו אֶבֶר כְּנִשְׂרִים יִרְצוּ וְלֹא יִיָּעֻו יִלְכוּ וְלֹא יִעֲפוּ: (פ)

Verses 41:1-4: As Creator, God exists outside of time and human history, directing it with an eternal plan and assembling nations before Him. At God’s behest, a righteous conqueror arises from the East.

Isaiah 41:2	ישעיהו מ"א:ב
Who raised up one from the East whom righteousness met wherever he set his foot, placing nations before him and subduing kings? His [the conqueror’s] sword makes them as dust; his bow [makes them] as driven chaff.	מִי הֵעִיר מִמִּזְרַח צֶדֶק יִקְרָאֵהוּ לְרַגְלוֹ וַיָּתוּ לְפָנָיו גּוֹיִם וּמְלָכִים וְרֶדְו יָתוּ בְּעַפְרֵו סְרָבֹו כִּקְשׁ נִדְוָו קִשְׁתּוֹ:

¹ With emendations, translations are from Sefaria.org. To dedicate, comment, or subscribe, email haftarahhelper@gmail.com.

² This view further connects the Haftarah to the Parashah’s introduction of Abraham.

³ The biblical “נִשְׂר” is the griffon vulture, not an eagle as typically translated. [Read here](#) for more on positions on the subject

Verses 41:5-7: Terrified nations and islands assemble, working jointly and mustering their material strength and craftsmanship⁴ to oppose the conqueror.

Isaiah 41:5	ישעיהו מ"א:ו
The isles saw and feared. Earth's ends trembled. They drew near, and came [together].	רָאוּ אַיִם וַיִּרְאוּ קִצּוֹת הָאָרֶץ וַתִּמְרְדוּ קָרְבוֹ וַיֵּאָתְיוּ:

Verses 41:8-13: God reassures the fearful exiles that as His chosen people and as descendants of His beloved Abraham, He will forever protect them and destroy their enemies.

Isaiah 41:8	ישעיהו מ"א:ח
[But] you are Israel - My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen; the descendants of My beloved Abraham.	וְאַתְּהָ יִשְׂרָאֵל עַבְדִּי יַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר בְּחַרְתִּיךָ וַרַע אֲבָרְתָם אֲהַבִּי:

Verses 41:14-16: Though the exiles may be vulnerable as worms, God will make them powerful so they can easily destroy their enemies. After this destruction, the exiles will rejoice in and praise God.

Isaiah 41:14	ישעיהו מ"א:יד
"Fear not, O worm of Jacob, you men of Israel - I help you!", declares the Lord and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.	אַל־תִּירָאִי תוֹלַעַת יַעֲקֹב מְתֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי עֲזַרְתִּיךָ נְאֻם־ה' וְגֹאֲלֶךָ קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Connections

A **daily morning blessing** includes the phrase, הַנּוֹתֵן לַיָּעֵף כֹּחַ ("Who gives strength to the weary"), from verse 40:29.

Siddur Ashkenaz, Weekday, Shacharit, Morning Blessings	סידור אשכנז, ימי חול, תפילת שחרית, ברכות השחר
Blessed are You, the Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who gives strength to the weary.	בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מְלֶכֶד הָעוֹלָם הַנּוֹתֵן לַיָּעֵף כֹּחַ:

R. Jacob ben Asher's Code of Jewish Law concludes with "Choshen Mishpat," codifying laws relating to judges, courts, and monetary matters. Its opening declares that **God loves Abraham's descendants when they devote themselves to God's path of *tzekakah u'mishpat* (righteous justice)**.

Tur, Choshen Mishpat 1:2	טור, חושן משפט א:ב
...The judge who breaks the high arms of the wicked, taking unjustly held property from them and returning it to its proper owners, sustains the world and completes the will of the Creator who created it to [continue] existing. [Such a judge] becomes, as it were, a partner with [God] in Creation. God knew [i.e., chose] our father Abraham and called him "My beloved" (Isa. 41:8) only because he walked in the path of justice and guided his children therein, as it is written, "For I [God] have known him [Abraham] since he will command his children and his household after him, that they may keep God's path, to do righteousness and justice..." (Gen. 18:19)	...הדיין המשבר זרועות רמות הרשעים ולוקח מידם טרף ומחזירו לבעלים מקיים העולם וגורם להשלים רצון הבורא יתברך שמו שבראו להיות קיים והרי כאילו נעשה שותף להקב"ה בבריאה ואברהם אבינו לא ידעו השם וקראו אוהבי אלא על אשר הלך בדרך המשפט והדריך בו בניו כדכתיב [בראשית יט] כי ידעתיו למען אשר יצוה את בניו ואת ביתו אחריו ושמרו את דרך ה' לעשות צדקה ומשפט

⁴ Most commentators assert that they're crafting idols; Daat Mikra suggests these idols accompanied their warriors into battle. Alternatively, Malbim and Daat Mikra suggest they're crafting battle weapons.