



This is the final of the **Three [Haftarot] of Affliction (Aramaic: תלת דפורענותא)**, describing the destruction of Judah, Jerusalem, and the First Temple in 586 BCE. They are recited on consecutive Shabbatot of the “Three Weeks”, between the fasts of the 17th of Tammuz and Tisha B’Av. Ashkenazi communities chant this Haftarah with the traditional, mournful melody of Eichah because Tisha B’Av occurs during the week following its recitation, and due to its content, including the word “אֵיכָה” in verse 21.

Three of Affliction #3 (Devarim-Hazon): Isaiah 1:1-27

The book of Isaiah’s opening prophecy presents his “Hazon”, or vision for society in God’s Land. Centered on the Temple in Jerusalem, God’s people exist to embody His righteousness and His sanctity -in that order- for humanity. Divine mercy gives them time to achieve God’s goal but failure will eventually cause Divine justice to destroy them, exiling survivors until they repent to deserve redemption. Divine justice permitted the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, to destroy and exile the unjust, idolatrous Northern Kingdom, ca. 720 BCE. The Haftarah’s unflinching portrait of a destroyed Judah alongside an unconquered Jerusalem matches the aftermath of Sennacherib’s failed siege of Jerusalem decades later, ca. 701 BCE; Divine justice continues on its path.

Isaiah laments that God’s vision is unfulfilled and witheringly condemns Judah’s failures. It does not recognize God as its master and sustainer. The resulting greed creates economic and political corruption and even murder. These create further injustice, as the powerful neglect the vulnerable. Not grasping that societal righteousness, like ritual purity, must precede the pursuit of Divine sanctity at the Temple, the people worship God there, but God is repulsed. Judah must reverse its injustices so that Jerusalem can again be a “City of Righteousness”, and Northern Kingdom exiles can return. Failing this, Jerusalem’s destruction is inevitable.¹

Haftarah Breakdown

Verse 1:1: Isaiah prophesied from the end of Uzziah’s reign (ca. 750 BCE) to the reign of Hezekiah (ca. 687 BCE).

Isaiah 1:1	ישעיהו א:א
The vision of Isaiah, son of Amoz, which he envisioned concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, [and] Hezekiah, kings of Judah.	חֲזוֹן יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ בֶן-אֲמוּץ אֲשֶׁר חָזָה עַל-יְהוּדָה וְיִירוּשָׁלַם בַּיָּמִי עֲזַרְיָהוּ יוֹתָם אֶתֵּן יְחֻזְקָהּ מִלְּבִי יְהוּדָה:

Verses 1:2-4: Calling on heaven and earth as witnesses, God exclaims that He reared generations of Judeans. More ignorant than animals, they deny the Master who sustains them, acting evilly and sinning against His sanctity.

Isaiah 1:3	ישעיהו א:ג
An ox knows its owner and a donkey, its master's [feeding] trough. [Yet] Israel does not know, My people do not consider.	יָדַע שׁוֹר קִנְיֹהוּ וְנִמְרוֹר אֲבוּס בְּעֵלָיו יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יָדַע עַמִּי לֹא הִתְבּוֹנֵן:

Verses 1:5-9: Like Sodom and Gomorrah, God has punished Judah for its sins, leaving it beaten, bloody, and ragged. Judah watches as foreigners destroy and consume its land. Only God’s mercy spared Jerusalem.

Isaiah 1:9	ישעיהו א:ט
Had not the Lord of Hosts left us a small remnant, we would have been like Sodom; we would resemble Gomorrah.	לוֹלֵי ה' צְבָקוֹת הוֹתִיר לָנוּ שְׂרִיד כְּמֵעֵט כְּסֻדָּם הָיִינוּ לְעִמְרָה דְמִיָּנוּ:

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

Verses 1:10-15: Judah and its leaders serve God with devotion at the Temple on holy days even as they oppress the vulnerable. Disgusted and outraged, God likens them to Sodom and Gomorrah. God rejects their disgusting sacrifices and prayers due to their blood-stained hands.

Isaiah 1:13	ישעיהו א:י"ג
Bring no more pointless grain offerings; they are incense of abomination to Me. [New] moons, sabbaths, and calling of assemblies- I [God] cannot bear iniquity along with solemn gatherings.	לא תוסיפו הביא מנחת-שְׁוֹא קֹטֶרֶת תועבה היא לי תִּדְּשׁ וְשַׁבַּת קָרָא מִקְרָא לֹא-אוֹבֵל אֲנִי וְעֶצְרָה:

Verses 1:16-17: To find favor in God's eyes, Judah must cleanse itself by stopping its evils and its evildoers. It must learn to improve itself and ensure justice for society's vulnerable.

Isaiah 1:17	ישעיהו א:י"ז
Learn to do well! Seek judgment! Relieve the oppressed! Save the orphan! Plead for the widow!	לִמְדוּ הַיָּטֵב דְרָשׁוּ מִשְׁפָּט אֲשֶׁר-וְחָמוּץ שְׁפָטוּ יְתוֹם רִיבוֹ אֶלְמֶנָה: (ט)

Verses 1:18-20: God reasons with Judah. If they turn from evil to good, He will forgive their sins and bloodied hands, and will again sustain them in the Land; otherwise, He will bring further war to destroy them.

Isaiah 1:19	ישעיהו א:י"ח
If you are willing and obey [Me], you shall eat the Land's goodness.	אם-תֵּאָבִי וּשְׁמַעְתָּם טוֹב הָאָרֶץ תֹּאכְלוּ:

Verses 1:21-23: Isaiah laments Jerusalem's condition. Instead of embodying God's justice, its political, judicial, and business elites are greedy and corrupt. They abuse and kill the vulnerable.

Isaiah 1:23	ישעיהו א:כ"ג
Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves- [all are] bribe lovers and pursuers of payments! The orphan they do not save; the widow's dispute does not reach them.	שָׂרֵיךָ סוֹרְרִים וְחֻבְרֵי גַבְיִים כָּלֹּא אֶהָב שָׁחַד וְרִחָף שְׁלֹמִימִים יְתוֹם לֹא יִשְׁפֹּטוּ וְרִיב אֶלְמֶנָה לֹא-יָבוֹא אֲלֵיהֶם: (פ)

Verses 1:24-27: Judah has therefore become God's enemy whom He will cleanse through punishment. God will then install new leaders so that Jerusalem and its returning exiles will again be known for fulfilling God's justice.

Isaiah 1:26	ישעיהו א:כ"ו
I [God] will restore your judges as at first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward, you shall be called City of Righteousness, Faithful City.	וְאֲשִׁיבָה שֹׁפְטֶיךָ כְּבָרְאשׁוֹנָה וְיִעֲצָדֶךָ כְּבִתְחִלָּה אַחֲרֵי-כֵן יִקְרָא לְךָ עִיר הַצְּדָקָה קִרְיַת נְאֻמָּה:

Connection

The **eleventh blessing of the daily Amidah** asks God to fulfill His promise in v. 26, above.

Weekday Shacharit, Amidah	שחרית לימי החול, עמידה
Restore our judges as at first, and our counselors as at the beginning, and remove sorrow and sighing from us...	הַשִּׁיבָה שׁוֹפְטֵינוּ כְּבָרְאשׁוֹנָה, וְיִוְעָצֵינוּ כְּבִתְחִלָּה, וְהִסֵּר מִמֶּנּוּ יְגוֹן וְאַנְחָה...