



Taken from the final third of the book of Isaiah, the “**Seven of Comfort**” (**Aramaic: שבע דנחמתא**) that are recited on the Shabbatot between Tisha B’Av and Rosh Hashanah do not relate to the weekly Torah reading. Instead, they powerfully describe the complex workings of the covenant between God, His people, His Land, and humanity as God redeems His people from exile, in Babylon and beyond, to return them to the Land.

## Seven of Comfort #2 (Eikev): Isaiah 49:14-51:3

In last week’s Haftarah, God proclaimed He is redeeming the exiles. Their punishment is over; all must comfort them. Unlike humanity and the idols they fashion, God has incomparable power to fulfill His promises by leading His people to the Land. Humanity will recognize God as Creator as a result. This week’s Haftarah presents the perspectives of the exiles, Zion, and Isaiah himself. The Land, Zion, is a mourning “mother” bereft of her “children” ,the exiles, who will never return. The people think their long exile means that God has ended His covenant with them. The people reject and even abuse Isaiah and his efforts to return them to God.

Isaiah responds by affirming that God’s help and word strengthen him against his opponent’s attacks, which do not deter him. Indeed, the exiles who reject him and the covenant will wither away and die. In contrast, God’s power will reverse the condition of the few faithful exiles who trust that they suffer as punishment for sin in the context of God’s ongoing covenant. As God brutally punishes Israel’s oppressors, their captors will escort the righteous to Zion. Unaware that her children rush to her, their arrival will astonish “mother” Zion: she won’t even recognize them! Just as God turned Abraham and Sarah into an entire nation, God will multiply the handful of returnees until they overflow and rebuild Zion’s ruins, transforming the entire Land into a joyful Garden of Eden.

### Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 49:14-16: “Her” children long ago exiled, Zion “thinks” that God has abandoned and forgotten her. God reassures her that, just as a mother never forgets her children, He has not forgotten her; she is forever before Him.

Isaiah 49:16	ישעיהו מ"ט:ט"ז
Behold I [God] have engraved you [Zion] upon My palms; your walls are continually before Me.	הֲלוֹ עַל־פְּתָיִם חִקְתִּיךְ חוֹמְתֶיךָ נִגְדִי תָמִיד:

Verses 49:17-23: God gives Zion hope: her invaders are departing. Foreign royalty will escort the exiled Jews to her. These “children,” whom Zion does not know, will soon overflow her desolate places.

Isaiah 49:21	ישעיהו מ"ט:כ"א
You [Zion] shall say to yourself, “Who bore me these? I am bereft of my children and alone - an exile, a wanderer to and fro! Who reared these? Behold, I was left alone; these - where are they [from]?”	וְאָמַרְתְּ בְלִבְבְּךָ מִי גִדְּלֵנִי אֶת־אֱלֹהִים וְאֲנִי שְׂכֻנָּה וְגִלְמוֹנֶה גִלְהָהּ   וְסוּרָה וְאֵלֶּה מִי גִדְּלָהּ הֲלוֹ אֲנִי נִשְׁאַרְתִּי לְבָדִי אֱלֹהִים אֵיפֹה הֵם:

Verses 49:24-26: Zion doubts that God can extract the exiles from their captors. God insists that He will do so, that He will punish those nations, and that humanity will recognize Him as Israel’s mighty Savior.

Isaiah 49:25	ישעיהו מ"ט:כ"ה
Thus says the Lord, “Even the mighty one’s captives shall be seized, and the tyrant’s prey be delivered. I will contend with him that contends with you [Zion], and I will save your children.”	כִּי־כֹה אָמַר ה' גַּם־שְׂבִי גְבוּרֵי יָקוּחַ וּמִלְקוּחַ עֲרִיזִים יִמְלָט וְאֶת־יְרִיבֶךָ אֲנֹכִי אֲרִיב וְאֶת־בְּנֵיךָ אֲנֹכִי אוֹשִׁיעַ:

Verses 50:1-3: Some exiles think that God has permanently terminated His covenant with them and Zion, but He has not, rather, exile is punishment for sin. God will even overturn nature to redeem those who answer His call.

Isaiah 50:1	ישעיהו נ:א
Thus says the Lord, “Where is your [Israel’s] mother’s [Zion’s] divorce document I sent her away with? To which of My [imagined] ‘creditors’ did I sell you? Behold- you were sold [exiled] for your iniquities, and your mother was sent away for your transgressions.”	כֹּה אָמַר ה' אֵי זֶה סֵפֶר כְּרִיתוֹת אִמְכֶם אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַחְתִּיהָ אוֹ מִי מְנוּשֵׁי אֲשֶׁר־מְכַרְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לֹ הֵן בְּעוֹנֹתֵיכֶם נִמְכַרְתֶּם וּבִפְשָׁעֵיכֶם שְׁלַחְתָּה אִמְכֶם:

Verses 50:4-7: Isaiah proclaims God’s word with His help, not flinching from his Divine mission despite attackers.

Isaiah 50:6	ישעיהו נ:ד
I [Isaiah] gave my back to those who hit, and my cheeks to those who pluck [hair]. I did not hide my face from shame and spitting.	גוֹי נָתַתִּי לַמְּלִימִים וּלְחַזְזֵי לְמַרְטִים פָּנַי לֹא הִסְתַּרְתִּי מִקְלָמוֹת וְרֹק:

Verses 50:8-11: With God near him, Isaiah challenges those exiles who reject him: woe will consume them. By contrast, God will redeem those exiles who, despite their suffering, heed the promises of His servant, Isaiah.

Isaiah 50:10	ישעיהו נ:י
Who among you [exiles] fears the Lord, obeying the voice of His servant; walking in darkness, and has no light? Let him trust in the Lord’s name, and rely upon his God.	מִי בְכֶם יִרָא ה' שֹׁמֵעַ בְּקוֹל עַבְדּוֹ אֲשֶׁר הִקְלַף חֹשְׁכִים וְאֵין נֹגֵה לֹ יִבְטַח בַּיְשׁוּם ה' וַיִּשְׁעַן בְּאֵלֵיקָיו:

Verses 51:1-3: As God did for Abraham and Sarah, Hewill again fulfill His promise to multiply the descendants of His few, righteous followers. God will transform desolate Zion into a Garden of Eden, filled with joy and song.

Isaiah 51:2	ישעיהו נ"א:ב
Look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who bore you! For [Abraham] was but one when I called him, and I blessed him and increased him.	הִבִּיטוּ אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אֲבִיכֶם וְאֶל־שָׂרָה תְּחוּלְלֵכֶם פִּי־אַתְדָּ קָרָאתִיו וְאַבְרָכָהוּ וְאַרְבָּהוּ:

## Connections

The Talmud brings to life the **debate about exile’s meaning**: termination of the covenant, or punishment for sin?

Sanhedrin 105a	סנהדרין ק"ה עמוד א
Ten people came and sat before [the prophet]. He said to them, “Repent.” They replied, “A slave sold by his owner, or a woman divorced by her husband- does one have any claim upon the other?!” The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to the prophet: “Go say to them, ‘Where is your mother’s divorce document I sent her away with? To which of My “creditors” did I sell you? Behold- you were sold [exiled] for your iniquities, and your mother was sent away for your transgressions.’ ” (Isaiah 50:1)	באו עשרה בני אדם וישבו לפניו אמר להן חזרו בתשובה אמרו לו עבד שמכרו רבו ואשה שגרשה בעלה כלום יש לזה על זה כלום? אמר לו הקב"ה לנביא לך אמור להן (ישעיהו נ, א) איזה ספר כריתות אמכם אשר שלחתיה או מי מנושי אשר מכרתי אתכם לו הן בעונותיכם נמכרתם ובפשעכם שלחה אמכם