



Shabbat Rosh Chodesh: Isaiah 66:1-24¹

This Haftarah, Isaiah’s final prophecy, presents visions of Israel in the Land, in exile, and in an apocalyptic redemption with the rest of humanity. In the Land, many Jews, falsely convinced of their own righteousness, reject and mock those who truly fear God. These mockers sacrifice to God but otherwise act evilly and reject the calls of God’s prophets. God accounts their Temple sacrifices as grave sins, deems them His enemies, and promises to kill them by bringing their worst fears upon them. In sharp contrast, the Creator of heaven and earth pays little heed to the Temple, a man-made building that cannot possibly contain Him. Instead, God cares for the lowly and poor people, and for those who fear Him.

Next, Isaiah describes “Mother” Zion, bereft of her children in exile. God will cause her to conceive and deliver new children with unheard-of speed and ease. Those who mourned Jerusalem will exult with her as He grants her peace and international renown. Zion and God deeply comfort and nourish the redeemed people.

Finally, Isaiah envisions an apocalyptic vision of a “new world” that God will create. Israel will endure forever, and its redemption by God has become known throughout the world. Messengers share the news with those who do not know. As He does with groups of His people, God rewards and punishes other nations depending on whether they serve Him. In Jerusalem and beyond, God slaughters the many non-Jews who reject or battle against Him. Yet many other non-Jews and nations recognize God. Just as devoted Jews bring sacrifices to God in pure vessels, these nations come to the Temple with animals bearing offerings to God- namely, the Jews exiled among them. These non-Jews prostrate in the Temple on each Sabbath and New Moon, and God appoints some of them as Priests and Levites. Upon departing the Temple, loyal Jew and non-Jews encounter the rotting corpses of God’s slaughtered, highlighting the wretched alternative to their proper choice to serve Him.²

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 66:1-2: God alone created heaven and earth. Since they are His mere seat, surely no earthly “house” suffices for Him. Instead, the all-powerful God watches over the poor and lowly, and over those who fear Him.

Isaiah 66:1	ישעיהו ס"ו:א
Thus says the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that you would build for me? and where is the place of my rest?	כֹּה אָמַר ה' הַשָּׁמַיִם כִּסֵּאִי וְהָאָרֶץ הַדָּם רַגְלִי אֵי-יִגָּה בַּיֵּת אֲשֶׁר תִּבְנֶה-לִּי וְאֵי-יִגָּה מְקוֹם מְנוּחָתִי:

Verses 66:3-4: At the Temple nonetheless built for Him, sacrifices of those who choose to do evil and who reject His calls are disgusting transgressions. In turn, God will choose that which they fear to terrorize them.

Isaiah 66:4	ישעיהו ס"ו:ד
I [God], too, will choose torments for them, and will bring their fears upon them- for when I called, there was no reply; when I spoke, they did not listen. They did evil [deeds] in My eyes, and chose what I did not delight in.	גַּם-אֲנִי אֶבְחַר בַּתַּעֲלָלֵיהֶם וּמִגִּוְרֹתֵם אֶבִּיא לָהֶם נַעַן קָרָאתִי וְאִין עֹנָה דִּבַּרְתִּי וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ הָרַע בְּעֵינָי וּבְאֲשֶׁר לֹא-הִתְפַּצְתִּי בָּהֶם: {ס}

¹ Even when Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh coincide, Ashkenazim omit this Haftarah in favor of the Haftarot of the “Four Parashiyot” and the “Seven of Consolation.” Nonetheless, Ashkenazim recite this Haftarah when Rosh Chodesh Elul coincides with the Shabbat of Parashat Re’eh. For Parashat Ki Tetzei in such years, Ashkenazim combine the Haftarot of Re’eh and Ki Tetzei, which directly follow one another in the Book of Isaiah, and recite them together. In this way, Ashkenazim recite all texts of the “Seven of Consolation.”

² With emendations, all translations are from Sefaria.org. To dedicate, comment, or subscribe, email haftarahhelper@gmail.com.

Verses 66:5-9: God is the enemy of, and will destroy, Jews who oppress their brethren who tremble at God's word. God will cause "mother" Zion to conceive and deliver her "children" with amazing speed and ease.

Isaiah 66:8	ישעיהו ס"ו:ח
Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth [produce] in one day? Or shall a nation be born in one moment? For when Ziyon travailed, she also brought forth her children.	מִי־שָׁמַע כְּזֹאת מִי רָאָה כְּאַלֶּה הַיּוֹחֵל אֶרֶץ בְּיוֹם אֶחָד אִם־יִנָּלֵד גּוֹי פְּעַם אַחַת כִּי־תֵלֵד גַּם־יִלְדָה צִיּוֹן אֶת־בְּנֵיהָ:

Verses 66:10-14: As God restores Jerusalem as the nation's mother, those who love and mourn will rejoice with her. Her comforted children will suckle from her. God will be known for this redemption and for destroying their evil foes.

Isaiah 66:10	ישעיהו ס"ו:י
Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad with her, all you that love her. Rejoice for joy with her, all who mourn for her.	שִׂמְחוּ אֶת־ירוּשָׁלַם וְגִילוּ בָּהּ כָּל־אֲהֻבֶיהָ שִׂישׂוּ אִתָּהּ מְשׁוּשׁ כָּל־הַמְתַּאבְּלִים עֲלֶיהָ:

Verses 66:15-18a: With fire, chariots, and swords, God will angrily kill His many foes, including idolaters and those who eat disgusting flesh, whose thoughts and deeds He knows.

Isaiah 66:15	ישעיהו ס"ו:ט"ו
For behold, the Lord will come with fire, and [with] his chariots like a storm, to wreak His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire.	כִּי־תָנֵה ה' בָּאֵשׁ יָבֹא וְכִסּוּפָה מְרַכְבְּתָיו לְהַשִּׁיב בַּחֲמָה אֵפוֹ וְגַעְרָתוֹ בְּלִהְבֵי־אֵשׁ:

Verses 66:18b-21: God will gather peoples from the corners of the Earth to perceive His glory in Jerusalem. Bearing a sign, messengers will declare His glory everywhere it is not yet known. The nations will bring exiled Jews with them on many animals, as offerings to God. God will even take Priests and Levites from the arriving nations.

Isaiah 66:21	ישעיהו ס"ו:כ"א
"From them, too, will I [God] take to be priests and Levites," says the Lord.	וְגַם־מֵהֶם אֶקַּח לַכֹּהֲנִים לְלוֹיִם אָמַר ה':

Verses 66:22-24³: God will create a new world that will endure forever, as will His people. On Sabbaths and New Moons, humanity will serve God at the Temple, after which they will see disgusting corpses slaughtered by God.

Isaiah 66:23	ישעיהו ס"ו:כ"ג
"And it shall be that on every new moon and on every sabbath, all flesh will come to prostrate before Me," says the Lord.	וְהָיָה מִדִּי־חֲדָשׁ בְּחֻדְשׁוֹ וּמִדֵּי שַׁבָּת בְּשַׁבְּתוֹ יָבֹא כָּל־בָּשָׂר לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לִפְנֵי אָמַר ה':

Connection

The Talmud derives from the Haftarah that a **soft, flesh-like heart is a prerequisite for effective prayer.**

Sotah 5a	סוטה ה עמוד א
Chizkiyah says: "One's prayers are heard only if he makes his heart like flesh, as (Isaiah 66:23) states: "...all flesh will come to prostrate before Me," says the Lord."	אָמַר חֲזִיקְיָה אֵין תְּפִלָּתוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם נִשְׁמַעַת אֲלֵא אִם כֵּן מֵשִׁים לְבוֹ כְּבָשָׂר שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר... יָבֹא כָּל בָּשָׂר לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לִפְנֵי אָמַר ה'

³ Verse 23 is repeated after verse 24 in order to end the Haftarah "bechi tov", on an uplifting note.