



Taken from the final third of the book of Isaiah, the “**Seven of Comfort**” (**Aramaic: שבוע דנהמתא**) 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 #4 (Shoftim): Isaiah 51:12-52:12

This week’s fourth Haftarah of Comfort reverses its predecessors’ orderly progression through Isaiah’s chapters (40, 48, 54) to convey a dramatically different tone and message.¹ Gone are the sins and protests of Jerusalem and the exiles, God’s protests, others’ attempts to comfort them, and the prophet’s words and woes.

Instead, God takes center stage, in the first person (“I”), to restore Jerusalem and join His people in ending their shared exile. God takes responsibility for brutally punishing them, for their constant terror, and for the incomparable misery that has knocked them out, asleep like a drunkard sprawled on the ground. God “realizes” that their exile has made humanity think He, too, is exiled from His land and too weak to save His people. God promises to never again punish them in this way. He will now punish their captors who unjustly mistreated them, and to whom they owe nothing. He repeatedly rouses Jerusalem and the exiles to awaken and rise from their stupor to renewed glory. The exiles must purify themselves so that God can “visibly” lead them out of exile, calmly and peacefully, to a rebuilt, redeemed Zion. Jubilation and international recognition of God’s sanctity and power will herald their arrival.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 51:12-16: God, the Creator, will “personally” comfort His people and Zion. The exiles constantly fear their oppressors because they have forgotten that God protects them from mortals- but as bearers of God’s word, they need to fear no mortal.

Isaiah 51:16	ישעיהו נ"א:ט"ז
I placed My words into your mouth and covered you with My hand’s shadow. [I] affixed the heavens and founded the earth [in order to] say to Zion, “You are My people.”	וְאָשִׁים דְּבַרִּי בְּפִיהָ וּבִצֵּל יָדִי כִּסִּיתִיהָ לְנֹטַע שְׁמַיִם וְלִיסֵד אֶרֶץ וְלֵאמֹר לְצִיּוֹן עַמִּי־אַתְּהָ: (ס)

Verses 51:17-20: God punished the exiles for their sins by having them drink His “cup” of poison. Jerusalem’s “children” have all collapsed from war and famine. No other nation’s suffering is comparable. Only God can comfort Jerusalem, so He calls to awaken them from their slumber.

Isaiah 51:17	ישעיהו נ"א:י"ז
Awaken, awaken, arise, Jerusalem! You have drunk from the Lord’s hand a cup of His wrath - you have drunk and drained the poisoned cup.	הַתְּעוֹרְרִי הַתְּעוֹרְרִי קוּמִי יְרוּשָׁלַם אֲשֶׁר שָׁתִית מִיַּד ה' אֶת־כּוֹס חֲמָתוֹ אֶת־קַבְּלֶעַת כּוֹס הַתְּרַעְלָה שָׁתִית מִצִּית:

Verses 51:21-23: Jerusalem and her exiles lie in a “drunken stupor.” God tells them He will never again punish them, and instead will punish those who humiliated them by trampling them underfoot.

Isaiah 51:22	ישעיהו נ"א:כ"ב
Thus says Your Master, the Lord, the God who contends for His people, "Behold, I have taken the poisoned cup from your hand. The cup of My wrath- you shall never again drink it."	כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָי־ה' וְאַלְקֵינוּ יְרִיב עִמּוֹ הִנֵּה לְקַחְתִּי מִיָּדְךָ אֶת־כּוֹס הַתְּרַעְלָה אֶת־קַבְּלֶעַת כּוֹס חֲמָתִי לֹא־תוֹסִיפִי לְשָׁתוּתָהּ עוֹד:

¹ [Machzor Vitry](#) (11th C., France) and [Abudarham](#) (14th C., Spain) also note this Haftarah’s sharp break from its predecessors.

Verses 52:1-2: God awakens the holy city, Jerusalem, whose invaders shall never return. Formerly captive, Zion must now sit upright² and don her finest.

Isaiah 52:2	ישעיהו נ"ב:ב
Shake yourself from the dust! Arise [and then] sit, Jerusalem! Loosen your neck bands, O captive daughter of Zion!	הַתְּנַעֲרִי מֵעָפָר קוֹמִי שְׁבִי יְרוּשָׁלַם הַתְּפַתְחוּ [הַתְּפַתְחִי] מוֹסְרֵי צְוֹאֲרֹתַי שְׁבִיָּהּ בַּת־צִיּוֹן: (ס)

Verses 52:3-6: Since the exiles' captors oppressed them without basis, the exiles owe them nothing when freed. Since His People's exile makes nations and the exiles scorn God as exiled and unable to save, God too must "leave" exile and redeem His people so that all will recognize Him.

Isaiah 52:5	ישעיהו נ"ב:ה
"Now why am I here?" says the Lord. "My people have been taken away for naught." "Their rulers howl," says the Lord, "and My name is blasphemed continually every day!"	וְעַתָּה מִה־לִּי־כֹה נֹאֵם־ה' כִּי־לָקַח עַמִּי חַנּוּם מֵאֲשָׁלוּ הִי־לִילּוֹ נֹאֵם־יְהוָה וְתַמִּיד כָּל־הַיּוֹם שְׁמִי מִנְאָצִין:

Verses 52:7-10: God's peaceful, "visible" return as king to Zion will comfort it and His people. Jubilation will greet Jerusalem's rebuilding. God's power to redeem Zion and His people will demonstrate His sanctity to all nations.

Isaiah 52:9	ישעיהו נ"ב:ט
Burst out in song, sing together, O ruins of Jerusalem! For the Lord has comforted His people- He has redeemed Jerusalem!	פָּצְחוּ רַגְנֵי יְהוּדוֹ הַרְבּוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם כִּי־נָחַם ה' עַמּוֹ גָּאֵל יְרוּשָׁלַם:

Verses 52:11-12: The exiles must purify themselves and promptly depart their cities of exile, bearing God's vessels. Unlike the rushed Exodus, this departure will be calm. God will lead and guard them.

Isaiah 52:12	ישעיהו נ"ב:י"ב
You shall not depart in haste nor leave in flight, for the Lord goes before you, and your rear guard is Israel's God!	כִּי לֹא בְּחַפְזוֹן תֵּצְאוּ וּבְמַגִּנּוֹסָה לֹא תִלְכוּן כִּי־הִלְךָ לְפָנֵיכֶם ה' וּמֵאַסְפֵּיכֶם אֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Connection

"**Lekha Dodi**", the poem sung at the beginning of Shabbat, echoes verses 51:17, and 52:1-2 of the Haftarah.

Lekha Dodi 5-6	לְכָה דוּדִי, הֵו
Shake yourself, arise from the dust / Dress in your garments of splendor, my people! / By the hand of Jesse's son of Bethlehem / Draw near to my soul and redeem it!	הַתְּנַעֲרִי מֵעָפָר קוֹמִי/לְבָשִׁי בְּגָדֵי תִפְאָרְתֶךָ עַמִּי/עַל יַד בֶּן יִשִׁי בֵּית הַלְחָמִי/קַרְבָּה אֶל נַפְשִׁי גָאֵלָה
Arouse yourself, arouse yourself! / For your light has come - arise, my light!³ / Awaken, awaken, utter a song! / The glory of the Lord is revealed upon you.	הַתְּעוֹרְרִי הַתְּעוֹרְרִי/כִּי כָּא אֹרֶךְ קוֹמִי אֹרִי/עוֹרִי עוֹרִי שִׁיר דְּבָרִי/כְבוֹד ה' עָלֶיךָ נִגְלָה

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

² Targum Yonatan, Rashi, and Metzudat David suggest that the command is for Jerusalem to sit on her throne.

³ This line is taken from Isaiah 60:1, the opening verse of the [sixth Haftarah of Comfort](#), read with Parashat Ki Tavo.