

Haftarah
for

Tishah B'Av
(Morning)

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• Haftarah for Tishah B'Av (Morning): Introduction •

FROM HOLIDAY TO HAFTARAH

Connecting the Text with the Occasion

This passage from the Book of Jeremiah is read on the morning of Tishah B'Av, the anniversary of the Babylonian army's destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. In this haftarah, the prophet conveys God's call to the leaders of public mourning, directing them to recite dirges and laments for the people and for the Land.

The fact that Jeremiah acknowledges the need for grieving, together with the vocabulary and style of his words, echoes the central ritual of this day: the recitation of Lamentations, a biblical book that describes the pain and suffering that followed the Babylonians' conquest of Jerusalem.

(The Torah reading for this occasion is Deuteronomy 4:25–40.)

THE PROPHET

The prophet Jeremiah lived in Jerusalem during the tragic period of the city's destruction by the Babylonians. Jeremiah prophesied for forty years, from 626 until 586 B.C.E. He witnessed the wrongdoing of the people and warned them again and again to repent their evil ways. Jeremiah predicted their doom, but they did not change, and eventually the Israelites were conquered.

Even with his prediction of the nation's destruction, Jeremiah continued to hold out

hope. He encouraged the people to retain their faith in God. Though the people rejected Jeremiah in his lifetime, after his death they came to regard him as a hero. Traditionally he is considered to be the author not only of the Book of Jeremiah but also of the Book of Lamentations. ↻

“Call to the wailing women
to come!
Send for the skillful ones,
and have them come!
Let them quickly raise
a dirge for us,
that our eyelids
may run with tears.”

Jeremiah 9:16-17

OVERVIEW

Our translation understands this haftarah as a dramatic conversation between God, the prophet Jeremiah, and the people Israel. According to the translator, the dialogue takes place in three stages. In the first stage (8:13–23), the parties speak up in the following order: God, Israel, God, Jeremiah, God, Israel, God, and Jeremiah. In the second stage (9:1–15), the speakers are: Jeremiah, God, an anonymous questioner, and Jeremiah. And in the third stage, the speakers are: God, Israel, Jeremiah, and God.

What do these parties say to each other? God declares that the people will suffer because of what they have done to God and their fellow human beings. Jerusalem has been completely destroyed and is now rubble. The people admit that they have sinned and mourn their loss. Jeremiah speaks on behalf of his own suffering as well as that of the Israelites. He also communicates God's will to the Israelites. At God's command, they begin to cry and mourn for Jerusalem.

In the final verses of the haftarah, the Israelites are given a message of hope. Although they have just witnessed a terrible destruction, they are told what they must do to return to God.

CONSIDER THIS

1. Tishah B'Av commemorates tragic events in the history of the Jewish people. What are some of these events? How does it help the Jewish community to remember these events each year?
2. Some communities observe Tishah B'Av by fasting and by reciting the Book of Lamentations. What are other ways in which we can remember these tragedies?
3. According to Jeremiah, what are some of the fateful sins that the Israelites committed? How did God want them to repent for their sins?



• Haftarah (Jeremiah 8:13-9:23) •

ח 13 אָסַף אֲסִיפִם

נְאֻם־יְהוָה

אֵין עֲנָבִים בַּגֶּפֶן

וְאֵין תְּאֵנִים בַּתְּאֲנָה

וְהָעֵלֶה נָבֵל

וְאַתֶּן לָהֶם יַעֲבְרוּם:

14 עַל־מָה אֲנַחֲנוּ יוֹשְׁבִים

הַאֲסָפוּ וְנִבּוֹא אֶל־עֲרֵי הַמְּבֻצָר

וְנִדְמָה־שָׁם

כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ הִדְמָנוּ

וַיִּשְׁקֵנוּ מִי־רֹאשׁ

כִּי חָטְאנוּ לַיהוָה:

15 קִנְיָה לְשָׁלוֹם וְאֵין טוֹב

לַעֲת מִרְפָּה* וְהִנֵּה בְעַתָּה:

16 מִדֶּן נִשְׁמַע נִחְרַת סוֹסִיו

מִקּוֹל מִצְהָלוֹת אַבְיָרִיו

*The traditional spelling here is unusual in that ה is written where כ is expected. We understand the meaning of this word as if it were spelled מרפא.

8:13] I will make an end of them—
says the Eternal—
[so that] there are no grapes on the vine,
no figs on the tree,
and the leaves wither,
and what I gave them will pass on [to the enemy].

14] Why are we sitting still?

Let us assemble and go to the fortified cities,
there to meet our doom.

For the Eternal our God has doomed us,
making us drink poisoned waters,
because we have sinned against the Eternal.

15] We hope for well-being but no good comes;
for a time of healing, and behold, terror.

16] From Dan is heard the snorting of his steeds;
at the neighing of his stallions

רַעֲשָׂה כָּל־הָאָרֶץ
 וַיָּבֹאוּ וַיֹּאכְלוּ אֶרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָהָ
 עִיר וַיִּשְׁבִּי בָהּ:
 17 כִּי הִנְנִי מְשַׁלַּח בְּכֶם נְחָשִׁים
 צַפְעָנִים אֲשֶׁר אֵין־לָהֶם לַחֹשׁ
 וְנִשְׁכּוּ אֶתְכֶם
 נְאֻם־יְהוָה:

18 מִבְּלִיגִיתִי עָלַי יִגּוֹן
 עָלַי לִבִּי דָוָי:
 19 הִנֵּה־קוֹל שׁוֹעֵת בַּת־עַמִּי מֵאֶרֶץ
 מִרְחָקִים
 הִיְהוּהָ אֵין בְּצִיּוֹן
 אִם־מִלְכָּה אֵין בָּהּ
 מִדוּעַ הִכְעֵסוּנִי בַּפְּסָלֵיהֶם
 בְּהַבִּילִי נִכְר:

20 עָבַר קָצִיר
 כָּל־הָקִיץ
 וְאֲנַחְנוּ לֹא נוֹשְׁעֵנוּ:
 21 עַל־שֶׁבֶר בַּת־עַמִּי הַשְּׁבֵרָתִי
 קִדְרָתִי שָׁמָּה הֶחֱזַקְתָּנִי:

the whole land quakes.

They come to consume the land and everything
in it,

the city and all who dwell there.

17] For behold I send snakes among you,
adders against whom no charm is proof
when they bite you—

says the Eternal.

18] My anguish has no cure;

I am sick at heart.

19] Hark! The cry of my people from a distant
land!

Is the Eternal not in Zion?

Is her Sovereign no longer in her midst?

Why have they angered Me with their idols,
their foreign no-gods?

20] The harvest has passed,

summer is over,

and we are not saved.

21] I am wracked by the wreckage of My [fair] people,
I [too] am in mourning: desolation has seized me.

22 הַצְּרִי אֵין בְּגִלְעָד
 אִם־רָפָא אֵין שָׁם
 כִּי מִדּוּעַ לֹא עָלְתָה אֲרֻכָּת בַּת־עַמִּי:
 23 מִי־יִתֵּן רֵאשִׁי מַיִם
 וְעֵינַי מִקּוֹר דְּמָעָה
 וְאֶבְכֶּה יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה
 אֵת חֲלָלֵי בַת־עַמִּי:

ט מִי־יִתְּנֵנִי
 בַּמִּדְבָּר מְלוֹן אֲרֻחִים
 וְאֶעֱזֹבָה אֶת־עַמִּי
 וְאֶלְכָה מֵאַתָּם
 כִּי כָל־מִנְאֻפִּים
 עֲצַרְתָּ בְּגָדִים:
 2 וַיִּדְרֹכּוּ אֶת־לְשׁוֹנְךָ קִשְׁתָּם
 שֶׁקֶר
 וְלֹא לְאִמוּנָה
 גָּבְרוּ בְּאַרְצְךָ
 כִּי מִרְעָה אֶל־רְעָה | יֵצְאוּ
 וְאֶתִּי לֹא־יִדְעוּ
 נְאֻם־יְהוָה:

22] Is there no balm in Gilead?

No healer there?

Why then does my people's wound remain
unhealed?

23] Would that my head were water,
and my eyes a fountain of tears;
I would weep day and night
for the slain of my fair people.

9:1] Would that I could find
a lodging place for travelers in the wilderness
so that I could leave my people,
and go away from them!
For they are all adulterers,
a band of traitors.

2] They bend their tongues like bows—
to lie.

They are mighty in the land—
but not for truth,
as they proceed from evil to evil,
“and Me they do not [want to] know,”
says the Eternal One.

3 אִישׁ מִרְעֵהוּ הַשְּׂמֹרוֹ
 וְעַל-כָּל-אֶח אֶל-תִּבְטְחוּ
 כִּי כָל-אֶח עֲקוּב יַעֲקֹב
 וְכָל-רֵעַ רֵכִיל יִהְיֶה לָּךְ׃
 4 וְאִישׁ בְּרֵעֵהוּ יִהְיֶה לּוֹ
 וְאָמַת לֹא יִדְבְּרוּ
 לְמַדּוֹ לְשׁוֹנֵם דְּבַר-שֹׁקֵר
 הַעוֹה נְלֹאוּ׃

5 שְׁבִתְךָ בְּתוֹךְ מְרֻמָּה
 בְּמְרֻמָּה מֵאֲנוּ דַעַת-אוֹתֵי
 נְאֻם-יְהוָה׃

6 לָכֵן כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת
 הַנְּנִי צוֹרֶפֶם וּבַחֲנֻתִים
 כִּי-אֵיךְ אֶעֱשֶׂה מִפְּנֵי בַת-עַמִּי׃

7 חָץ שׁוֹחֵט שָׁחוּט לְשׁוֹנֵם
 מְרֻמָּה דָּבַר בְּפִיו
 שְׁלוֹם אֶת-רֵעֵהוּ יִדְבֹר
 וּבִקְרָבוֹ יִשִּׁים אֲרָבוֹ׃

8 הֵעַל-אֱלֹה לֹא-אֶפְקַד-בָּם
 נְאֻם-יְהוָה׃

3] Let each beware of the other,
and do not depend on your kin!
For every brother is a heel-grabber,
and every friend goes about as a slanderer.

4] Each deceives the other,
no one speaks the truth;
they have trained their tongues to lie;
they are worn out with their own iniquity.

5] Amidst deceit is Your dwelling,
“[and] deceitfully they refuse to acknowledge Me,”
says the Eternal One.

6] Therefore, thus says the God of heaven's hosts:
Behold, I will refine and test them,
for what else can I do about My people?

7] Their tongues are deadly arrows,
speaking deceitfully through their mouths;
they speak cordially to their friends,
while inwardly setting traps for them.

8] Should I not punish them for these things?—
says the Eternal One—

אִם בְּגוֹי אֲשֶׁר-כָּזָה

לֹא תִתְנַקֶּם נַפְשִׁי:

9 עַל-הַהָרִים

אִשָּׁא בְּכִי וְנָהִי

וְעַל-נְאוֹת מְדַבֵּר

קִינָה

כִּי נִצַּתוּ מִבְּלִי-אִישׁ עִבֵר

וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ קוֹל מִקְנָה

מִעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְעַד-בְּהֵמָה

נִדְדוּ הַלְכוּ:

10 וְנָתַתִּי אֶת-יְרוּשָׁלַם יְרוּשָׁלַיִם לְגִלִים

מִעוֹן תַּנִּים

וְאֶת-עָרֵי יְהוּדָה אֶתֵּן שְׁמָמָה

מִבְּלֵי יוֹשֵׁב:

11 מִי-הָאִישׁ הַחֲכָם וַיִּבֶן אֶת-זֹאת

וְאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר פִּי-יְהוָה אֵלָיו וַיִּגְדֵה

עַל-מָה אֲבָדָה הָאָרֶץ נִצַּתָה כַּמְדַבֵּר

מִבְּלֵי עִבֵר:

12 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה

Should I not avenge Myself
against such a nation?

9] For the hills

I take up weeping and wailing,
for the pastures of the wilderness
a dirge.

They are scorched,
so that no one can pass through,
and the lowing of cattle is not heard.

Birds of the air, animals—
all have fled and are gone.

10] I will make Jerusalem a heap, a haunt of
jackals,
and the towns of Judah will I make a wasteland
without inhabitants.

11] Who is wise enough to understand this?
To whom has God spoken, so they may impart it?
Why is the land destroyed, scorched like the desert,
without a passerby?

12] The Eternal One said:

עַל־עֲזֹבְכֶם אֶת־תּוֹרָתִי אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי
לפניהם

וְלֹא־שָׁמְעוּ בְקוֹלִי וְלֹא־הִלְכוּ בְהִיאָה:
13 וַיִּלְכּוּ אַחֲרַי שְׁרָרוֹת לִבָּם
וְאַחֲרַי הִבְעֵלִים

אֲשֶׁר לְמִדּוּם אֲבוֹתָם:

14 לָכֵן כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה יְהוּדָה צְבָאוֹת
אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

הִנְנִי מֵאֲכִילֶם אֶת־הָעַם הַזֶּה לַעֲנָה
וְהִשְׁקִיתִים מִי־רֹאשׁ:

15 וְהִפְצוֹתִים בְּגוֹיִם

אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדְעוּ הֵמָּה וְאַבוֹתָם
וְשִׁלַּחְתִּי אַחֲרֵיהֶם אֶת־הַחֶרֶב
עַד כִּלּוֹתִי אוֹתָם:

16 כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה יְהוּדָה צְבָאוֹת

הַתְּבוֹנְנִי וְקִרְאוּ לְמִקּוֹנְנוֹת וּתְבוֹאִינָה
וְאֶל־הַחֲכָמוֹת שְׁלַחוּ וּתְבוֹאֵנָה:

17 וּתְמַהֲרֵנָה וּתְשַׁנְּהוּ* עָלֵינוּ נְהִי

*The traditional spelling here is unusual in that an expected yet silent א is missing. We understand the meaning of this word as if it were spelled ותשאנה.

Because they forsook My Teaching I had set
before them,
and neither listened to My voice nor followed it,
13] but stubbornly followed their own hearts—
[followed] the Baals,
as their ancestors taught them.
14] Therefore says the God of heaven's hosts,
the God of Israel:
Behold, I will give this people wormwood to eat
and poison to drink,
15] and scatter them among nations
unfamiliar to them and their ancestors,
and make the sword pursue them
until I have consumed them.

16] Thus says the God of heaven's hosts:
Pay heed, and call to the wailing women to come!
Send for the skillful ones, and have them come!
17] Let them quickly raise a dirge for us,

וְתִרְדְּנָה עֵינֵינוּ דְמַעָּה
 וְעַפְעַפֵּינוּ יִזְלוּ-מַיִם:
 18 כִּי קוֹל נְהִי נִשְׁמַע מִצִּיּוֹן
 אֵיךְ שִׁדְדָנוּ בְּשָׁנוּ מְאֹד
 כִּי-עֲזַבְנוּ אֶרֶץ
 כִּי הִשְׁלִיכוּ מִשְׁכְּנוֹתֵינוּ:
 19 כִּי-שָׁמַעְנָה נָשִׁים דְּבַר-יְהוָה
 וְתִקַּח אֲזִנֹּתֵיכֶם דְּבַר-פִּי
 וְלִמְדָנָה בְּנוֹתֵיכֶם נְהִי
 וְאִשָּׁה רְעוּתָה קִינָה:
 20 כִּי-עָלָה מוֹת בְּחַלוּנֵינוּ
 בָּא בְּאַרְמְנוֹתֵינוּ
 לְהִכְרִית עוֹלָל מְחוּץ
 בְּחוּרִים מֵרַחֲבוֹת:
 21 דִּבֶּר כֹּה נְאֻם-יְהוָה
 וְנִפְלָה נְבִלַת הָאָדָם
 כְּדָמָן עַל-פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה
 וּכְעָמִיר מֵאַחֲרֵי הַקֶּצֶר
 וְאֵין מְאֻסָּף:

that our eyelids may run with tears,
our eyes flow with water!

18] For out of Zion is heard a dirge:
How are we ruined, and greatly shamed!
For we have left our land;
for they have destroyed our dwellings!

19] So hear, you women, the word of the Eternal,
let your ears take [in] the word of God's mouth;
teach a dirge to your daughters,
and each other a lament!

20] Death has come up through our windows,
has entered our palaces
to cut off children from the streets,
young people from the thoroughfares.

21] Thus shall you speak—says the Eternal One:
People's corpses shall fall
like dung on the field,
like sheaves after the harvester,
with no one to gather them up.

22 כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה

אֱלֹהֵי־תְהִלָּל חָכַם בְּחִכְמָתוֹ

וְאֱלֹהֵי־תְהִלָּל הַגִּבּוֹר בְּגִבּוֹרָתוֹ

אֱלֹהֵי־תְהִלָּל עָשִׂיר בְּעִשְׂרוֹ:

23 כִּי אִם־בּוֹזֵאת יְתַהַלֵּל הַמְתַּהַלֵּל

הַשֶּׁבֶל וַיִּדַע אוֹתִי

כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה

עֲשֵׂה חֶסֶד מִשְׁפָּט וַיְצַדֵּק בְּאָרֶץ

כִּי־בִאֵלָה חִפְצָתִי

נֶאֱסִי־הוּהָ:

22] Thus says the Eternal One:

Let not the wise glory in their wisdom,
let not the mighty glory in their might,
let not the rich glory in their riches;

23] but let them who glory, glory in this:
that they understand and know Me—
that I, the Eternal, practice kindness,
justice, and righteousness in the earth;
for in these things do I delight

—says the Eternal One.

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