

Haftarah
for

Tishah B'Av
(Afternoon)

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

FROM HOLIDAY TO HAFTARAH

Connecting the Text with the Occasion

During the first half of Tishah B'Av, through the morning, Jews fast and pray as they recall the destruction of Jerusalem and its horrors (as well as other national calamities). Now, in the afternoon, we continue to fast and pray but with a different focus: we ask God to be merciful to us in the future. This haftarah encourages that effort and emphasizes divine mercy and forgiveness.

Some rabbis in the Middle Ages made another connection between this haftarah and the occasion: they saw the prophet's message to "do what is right" (*va-asu tz'dakah*; 56:1) as a reminder to us to "give tzedakah." Making an extra donation to charity is one of the customary practices during the afternoon of a fast day. As we ask God for mercy, so we ourselves show mercy to others.

(The Torah reading for this occasion is Exodus 32:11–14 and 34:1–10.)

THE PROPHET

Although our haftarah portion is found in the Book of Isaiah, it is probably not the work of the prophet Isaiah. Most scholars agree that the Book of Isaiah contains the work of more than one author. Apparently a later prophet lived circa 540 B.C.E., two hundred years after Isaiah himself. Scholars refer to this second, unnamed prophet as Second Isaiah or Deutero-Isaiah; they believe that he lived in Babylonia and composed the poetry in chapters 40–66.

Deutero-Isaiah is God's spokesperson, addressing the people of Israel as though God speaks through his lips. His main message is of hope and consolation to that portion of the people exiled in Babylonia.

OVERVIEW

This haftarah begins with a call to the Israelites to give up their wicked ways and turn to God in repentance. The prophet assures the Israelites that God

Seek the Eternal
while there is still time;
call out while God is near.

Isaiah 55:6

will forgive them and that the people will enjoy happiness, security, and a renewed covenant with God. This covenant will include many persons, such as eunuchs and foreigners, who had previously been excluded from the community of Israel. These persons, as well as the existing Israelite community, must be committed to observing the Sabbaths and following God's path in order to be a part of this covenant.

This passage ends with a vision in which all peoples, now scattered by the exile, will be gathered to God's "holy mountain" (56:7) in worship.

CONSIDER THIS

1. On the morning of Tishah B'Av, we read a haftarah about all the pain and suffering that followed the destruction of the Temple. This passage for the afternoon, on the other hand, is a message of hope. Why do you think we read both of them on the same day?
2. Isaiah's vision is that one day all people will worship God in one place, even those who are not yet part of the Israelite community. How do we welcome new and different people into our communities today? What is your vision for the future?



• Haftarah (Isaiah 55:6-56:8) •

נה 6 דַּרְשׁוּ יְהוָה בְּהַמְצֵאוֹ

קִרְאוּהוּ בְּהִיּוֹתוֹ קָרוֹב:

7 יַעֲזֹב רָשָׁע דְרָכָו

וְאִישׁ אֲוֵן מִחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ

וַיֵּשֶׁב אֶל־יְהוָה

וַיִּרְחַמֵּהוּ

וְאֶל־אֱלֹהֵינוּ

כִּי־יִרְבֶּה לְסִלּוּחַ:

8 כִּי לֹא מִחֲשַׁבּוֹתַי מִחֲשַׁבּוֹתֵיכֶם

וְלֹא דַרְכֵיכֶם דַּרְכֵי

נְאֻם יְהוָה:

9 כִּי־גָבְהוּ שָׁמַיִם מֵאָרֶץ

כֵּן גָּבְהוּ דַרְכֵי מִדְרָכֵיכֶם

וּמִחֲשַׁבְתֵי מִמִּחֲשַׁבְתֵיכֶם:

10 כִּי כַּאֲשֶׁר יִרְדֹּה הַגֶּשֶׁם וְהַשֶּׁלֶג

מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְשָׁמָּה לֹא יָשׁוּב

55:6] Seek the Eternal while there is still time;
call out while God is near.

7] Let the wicked forsake their ways,
and the sinful their thoughts.

Let them return to the Eternal,
who will show them compassion;
to our God,
who is quick to forgive.

8] “For My thoughts are not like yours,
nor are your ways like Mine,”
says the Eternal One.

9] “For high as the heavens above the earth,
so are My ways high above your ways,
and My thoughts above your thoughts.

10] Just as rain and snow come down from the sky
without returning,

כִּי אִם־הִרְוֶה אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְהוֹלִידָהּ
וְהִצְמִיחָהּ

וְנָתַן זֶרַע לַזֵּרַע וְלֶחֶם לְאֹכְלֵי:

11 כִּן יִהְיֶה דְבַרִּי אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִפִּי

לֹא־יָשׁוּב אֵלַי רִיקִם

כִּי אִם־עָשָׂה אֶת־אֲשֶׁר חָפַצְתִּי

וְהִצְלִיחַ אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַחְתִּיו:

12 כִּי־בִשְׂמִיחָה תֵצֵאוּ

וּבִשְׁלוֹם תִּבְלֹוּן

הַהָרִים וְהַגְּבָעוֹת יִפְצְחוּ לְפָנֵיכֶם רִנָּה

וְכָל־עֵצֵי הַשָּׂדֶה יִמְחֲאוּ־כָף:

13 תַּחַת הַנֶּעְצוּץ יַעֲלֶה בְרוֹשׁ

תַּחַת וְתַחַת הַסְּרָפָד יַעֲלֶה הַדָּס

וְהָיָה לִיהוָה לְשֵׁם

לְאוֹת עוֹלָם לֹא יִכָּרֵת:

נו כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה

שִׁמְרוּ מִשְׁפָּט וַעֲשׂוּ צְדָקָה

כִּי־קְרוּבָה יִשׁוּעָתִי לָבוֹא

וְצְדָקָתִי לְהַגְלוֹת:

but water the earth—making it blossom and bear fruit,
yielding seed for sowing and bread to eat—

11] so it is with the word that comes from My mouth:
it does not return to Me unfulfilled,
without having accomplished My desire;
and achieved what I send it to do.”

12] For you shall go out in joy;
you shall be led forth in peace.

Before you, mountains and hills shall break out in
joyous song,

and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

13] Cypresses shall grow instead of thorn-bushes,
myrtle instead of briar.

These shall be a monument to God,
an everlasting sign that will stand firm.

56:1] Thus says the Eternal One:

“Maintain justice and do what is right,
for My salvation is close at hand,
and revealed shall be My vindication.”

2 אֲשֶׁרִי אָנוּשׁ יַעֲשֶׂה-זֹאת

וּבֶן-אָדָם יַחֲזִיק בָּהּ

שֹׁמֵר שַׁבָּת מִחֻלָּו

וְשֹׁמֵר יָדוֹ מִמַּעֲשׂוֹת כָּל-רָע׃

3 וְאֵל-יֹאמֵר בֶּן-הַנֶּכֶד הַנְּלוּהָ אֶל-יְהוָה

לֵאמֹר

הַבְּדֵל יַבְדִּילֵנִי יְהוָה מֵעַל עַמּוֹ

וְאֵל-יֹאמֵר הַסְּרִיס

הֵן אֲנִי עֵץ יָבֵשׁ׃

4 כִּי-כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה

לְסַרְיִסִים אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁמְרוּ אֶת-שַׁבְּתוֹתַי

וּבָחֲרוּ בְאֲשֶׁר חִפְצָתִי

וּמִחֲזִיקִים בְּבְרִיתִי׃

5 וְנָתַתִּי לָהֶם בְּבֵיתִי וּבְחֹמֹתַי

יָד וְשֵׁם

טוֹב מִבָּנִים וּמִבָּנוֹת

שֵׁם עוֹלָם אֶתֶן-לוֹ

אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִפָּרֵת׃

6 וּבְנֵי הַנֶּכֶד הַנְּלוּיִם עַל-יְהוָה לְשָׂרְתוֹ

וּלְאַהֲבָה אֶת-שֵׁם יְהוָה

2] Happy is the one who does this,
the person that holds fast to it—
who keeps the Sabbath lest it be profaned,
who keeps from all wrongdoing.

3] Never more let the foreigner who has joined the
Eternal say,
“The Eternal will keep me apart from God’s people.”
And nevermore let the eunuch say,
“I am but a withered tree.”

4] For thus says the Eternal One to those eunuchs
who keep My Sabbaths
and choose what pleases Me
and hold fast to My covenant:

5] “In My House, within My walls,
I will give you a monument and a name
better than sons and daughters;
I will give you an everlasting name
that will never be cut off.

6] As for the foreigners who join themselves to the
Eternal

לְהִיּוֹת לוֹ לְעֹבְדִים
 כָּל־שֹׁמֵר שַׁבַּת מִחֻלּוֹ
 וּמִחֻזְקִים בְּבְרִיתִי:
 7 וַהֲבִיאוֹתִים אֶל־הַר קְדְשִׁי
 וְשִׁמְחֹתִים בְּבֵית תְּפִלָּתִי
 עוֹלְתֵיהֶם וְזֹבְחֵיהֶם לְרָצוֹן עַל־מִזְבְּחִי
 כִּי בֵיתִי
 בֵּית־תְּפִלָּה יִקְרָא לְכָל־הָעַמִּים:
 8 נָאִם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה אֱלֹהִים מְקַבֵּץ
 נְדָחֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
 עוֹד אֶקְבֹּץ עָלָיו לְנִקְבְּצָיו:

in love and service,
who keep the Sabbath lest it be profaned,
and hold fast to My covenant:
7] I will bring them to My holy mountain
and make them joyful in My house of prayer.
[I will accept] the burnt offerings and sacrifices they
offer on My altar:
for My House
shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”
8] This is the promise of the Eternal God
who brings Israel’s exiles home:
“I will yet bring more home, besides those I have
already brought.”

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