



Fast Days (Ashkenazim): Isaiah 55:6–56:8

Ashkenazim read this Haftarah at Mincha on all fast days except for Yom Kippur. (Sephardim generally recite no Haftarah on these days.) This is done to encourage the giving of charity, which the Talmud deems the most important aspect of fast days:

Tosafot on Megillah 21a- s.v. “One who Reads”	תוספות על מגילה כ"א. - ד"ה הקורא
The reason we recite a Haftarah at Mincha on a fast day and not[, as usual,] at Shacharit accords with the verse [in the Haftarah, Isa. 56:1]: “Keep justice and do righteousness (charity).” The reward of a fast stems from charity [given] in the evening [Berachot 6a], so it is proper to recite [this Haftarah] in the evening after giving charity.	הטעם שמפטיר במנחה בתענית ולא בשחרית משום דכתיב בה שמרו משפט ועשו צדקה (ישעיה נ"א) ואגרא דתעניתא צדקתא לעת ערב ומש"ה נכון לאומרו בערב אחר שעשו צדקה:

In the final third of his book, Isaiah addresses Israelites in exile- Northern Kingdom exiles in Assyria, future Judean exiles in Babylon, and more. Suffering, and failing to properly understand their relationship to God or the meaning of their exile, they worsen their situation with sin. Isaiah prophesies to teach, comfort, inspire and return them to God with hope and visions of their, and God’s, glorious future and role among humanity.

This Haftarah addresses exiles whose thoughts and deeds are sinful and wrong, as well as others who fear that God has cut them off despite their loyalty to Him. Isaiah tells them that God’s thoughts and deeds are far exalted above theirs, and that His promise to save them soon is inviolable. To deserve redemption by God who is both righteous and forgiving, they must return to Him by abandoning evil, pursuing righteousness in society, and observing the Sabbath. God will then accept their repentance and end their exile. Their journey home to the Land will be joyful and peaceful, heralded by nature and permanently changing it. The exiles, those loyal to God who nonetheless fear that He has cut them off, and all nations devoted to God will return to the Temple, a House of prayer, joy, sacrifices, and eternal closeness to God. God will gather ever more devotees unto them and Him.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 55:6-7: All should seek and call upon God when He is near. Since God is merciful and forgives, evildoers should abandon their ways and those who think sinfully should abandon their thoughts.

Isaiah 55:7	ישעיהו נ"ה:ז
Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord who will have mercy upon him, and to our God who abundantly forgives.	יעזב רשע דרכו ואיש און מחשבתי וישוב אל-ה', וירחמנו ואל-אלקינו כִּי־יִרְבֶּה לְסִלּוֹת:

Verses 55:8-11: By contrast, the thoughts and ways of God are far exalted above those of people. He fulfills His word as reliably as Earth’s water cycle sustains agricultural production.

Isaiah 55:8	ישעיהו נ"ה:ח
“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” says the Lord.	כִּי לֹא מַחְשְׁבוֹתַי מַחְשְׁבוֹתֵיכֶם וְלֹא דַרְכֵיכֶם דַּרְכֵי נְאֻם ה':

Verses 55:12-13: When God fulfills His word to return the exiles to the Land, they will depart and travel with joy and peace. Mountains and forests they pass through will rejoice. Myrtles and cypress trees will replace thorny plants of the wilderness they pass through, enduring permanently as a sign of God's kindness.

Isaiah 55:12	ישעיהו נ"ה:י"ב
For you shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.	כִּי־בְשִׂמְחָה תֵצְאוּ וּבְשָׁלוֹם תִּוְבְּלוּן הַהָרִים וְהַגְּבֻעוֹת יִפְצְחוּ לִפְנֵיכֶם רִנָּה וְכָל־עֵצֵי הַשָּׂדֶה יִמְחֲאוּ־כַף:

Verses 56:1-2: God will soon save His people, revealing His righteousness. Accordingly, God's people must pursue justice and righteousness, keep God's sabbaths, and avoid evil.

Isaiah 56:1	ישעיהו נ"ו:א
Thus says the Lord, Keep judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed.	כֹּה אָמַר ה' שְׁמְרוּ מִשְׁפָּט וַעֲשׂוּ צְדָקָה כִּי־קְרוֹבָה יְשׁוּעָתִי לָבוֹא וְצְדָקָתִי לְהִגְלוֹת:

Verses 56:3-7: Exiled Jews who are eunuchs who cannot father children, and loyal converts whose children may not be Jewish or who may not inherit the Land, fear they have no future with God and His people. God promises them an eternal memorial at His Temple, where they will rejoice, pray, and sacrifice along with all other peoples.

Isaiah 56:7	ישעיהו נ"ו:ז
I will bring them to My holy mount, and I will cause them to rejoice in My house of prayer, their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be acceptable upon My altar, for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.	וְהִבִּיאֹתִים אֶל־הַר קֹדְשִׁי וְשִׂמְחָתִים בְּבַיִת תְּפִלָּתִי עוֹלֹתֵיהֶם וְזִבְחֵיהֶם לְרִצּוֹן עַל־מִזְבְּחִי כִּי בֵיַתִּי בֵּית־תְּפִלָּה יִקְרָא לְכָל־הָעַמִּים:

Verses 56:8: God will gather ever more people unto His people.

Isaiah 56:8	ישעיהו נ"ו:ח
The Lord God who gathers the outcasts of Israel says: "Yet will I gather others to him, besides those who are already gathered."	נְאֻם ה' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹד אֶקְבְּצֶנּוּ עֲלָיו לְנִקְבְּצָיו

Connection

Yad VaShem, Israel's Holocaust memorial, **derives its name** from the Haftarah:

Isaiah 56:5	ישעיהו נ"ו:ה
I will give them in My house and in My walls a place and a name (Yad VaShem) , better than sons and daughters; an everlasting name I will give him, which will not be discontinued.	וְנָתַתִּי לָהֶם בְּבֵיתִי וּבְחוֹמֹתַי יָד וְשֵׁם טוֹב מִבָּנִים וּמִבָּנוֹת שֵׁם עוֹלָם אֶתְּנֶנּוּ לָאִשָּׁר לֹא יִכָּרֵת: (ס)

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