

Haftarah Helper 5780: Fast Days

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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 that we recite a Haftarah at Mincha on a fast day and not at Shacharit accords with the verse [in our Haftarah, Isaiah 56:1]: "Keep justice and practice righteousness (charity)". Charity in the evening (creates) the reward of a fast [Berachot 6a], so it is appropriate 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:

The prophet speaks to Israelites in exile, as part of a series of prophecies of comfort and redemption. He also calls out to those who are or think they are, "cut off" from Him. Repentance and service of God will grant both groups a place in "God's house."

Haftarah Breakdown

Verses 55:5-7: God is near and accepts repentance.

Isaiah 55:7	ישעיהו נ"ה:ז
The wicked shall give up his way, and the man of iniquity his thoughts, and he shall return to the Lord, Who shall have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will freely pardon.	יֵעֲזֹב רָשָׁע דַּרְכּוֹ וְאִישׁ אֶון מִחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ וַיָּשָׁב אֲלֵהּ, וַיִּרְחַמֶּהוּ וְאֵל־אֱלֹקֵינוּ כִּי־יִרְבֶּה לְסִלּוּחַ:

Verses 55:8-9: Yet God is also high above- so follow His will, not our human will.

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 מִחֲשַׁבֹתַי מִחֲשַׁבֹתֵיכֶם וְלֹא דַרְכֵיכֶם דַּרְכֵי נֶאֱמַר ה'

Verses 55:10-13: God will surely fulfill His promises of redemption to those who heed His will.

Isaiah 55:12	ישעיהו נ"ה:י"ב
For with joy shall you go forth, and with peace shall you be brought; the mountains and the hills shall burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap hands.	כִּי־בְשִׂמְחָה תֵצְאוּ וּבְשָׁלוֹם תּוּבְלוּן הַהָרִים וְהַגְּבָעוֹת יִפְצְחוּ לְפָנֵיכֶם רִנָּה וְכָל־עֵצֵי הַשָּׂדֶה יִמְחֲאוּ־כַף:

Verses 56:1-6: Those who are, or think they are, "cut off" from God...

Isaiah 56:6	ישעיהו נ"ו:ו
And the foreigners who join with the Lord to serve Him and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, everyone who observes the Sabbath from profaning it and who holds fast to My covenant	וּבְנֵי הַנְּכַר הַנְּלֻיִם עַל־הַ לְשָׁרְתוֹ וְלֹא־הִבֶּה אֶת־שֵׁם הַ לְהִיּוֹת לוֹ לְעַבְדִים כָּל־שֹׁמֵר שַׁבָּת מִחֲלָלוֹ וּמִחֲזִיקִים בְּבְרִיתִי:

Haftarah Breakdown (cont.)

Verses 56:7-8: ...nonetheless can serve God in His House.

Isaiah 56:7	ישעיהו נ"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.	וְהֵבִיאוּתִימֵ אֶל־הַר קֹדֶשׁ יִי וְשִׁמְחֵתִים בְּבֵית תְּפִלָּתִי עוֹלֹתֵיהֶם וְזִבְחֵיהֶם לְרִצּוֹן עַל־מִזְבְּחִי כִי יֵיטִי בֵית־תְּפִלָּה יִקְרָא לְכָל־הָעַמִּים:

Important Themes

Repentance and Return: God promises all who sincerely return to Him a place in His House. God is making Himself fully available, and making His word clear. He wants repentance, will accept all those who return and seek Him (including non-Jews), and will fulfill His inviolable promises. See verses 55:5-6 and 56:1-6.

The inscrutability of God's Will: As Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pekuda explains in Duties of The Heart (Hebrew: Chovot HaLevavot):

Duties of the Heart, Treatise on Trust	חובות הלבבות, שער הביטחון
The ways of judgments of the Creator are too hidden, deep, and lofty for us to understand [even] part of them, and all the more so to understand their entirety. Scripture already says: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts [higher] than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).	והליכות דיני הבורא יתעלה יותר נעלמות ועמקות ועליונות מהגיע אל ידיעת חלקיהן כל שכן כללן. וכבר אמר הכתוב (ישעיה נה ט) כי גבהו שמים מארץ כן גבהו דרכי מדרכיכם ומחשבתי ממחשבותיכם.

See verses 55:8-13 for further examples of this in the Haftarah.

Other Connections

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

Isaiah 56:5	ישעיהו נ"ז:
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 אֶתֶן־לוֹ אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִכָּרֵת: (ו)

Following the Talmud in Rosh HaShanah 18a, Maimonides rules that the opening of the Haftarah refers to **the "Aseret Yemei Teshuvah."**

Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 2:6	משנה תורה, הלכות תשובה ב:ו
Even though repentance and calling out [to God] are desirable at all times, during the ten days between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, they are even more desirable and will be accepted immediately as [Isaiah 55:6] states: "Seek God when He is to be found."	אף על פי שהתשובה והצעקה יפה לעולם. בעשרה הימים שבין ראש השנה ויום הכפורים היא יפה ביותר ומתקבלת היא מיד שנאמר (ישעיה נה ו) "דרשו ה' בהמצאו".

Biblical translations by Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg. Other translations from Chabad.org and Sefaria.org

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