



Tisha B'Av: Jeremiah 8:13-9:23

In Tisha B'Av's Torah reading, Moses prophesies that God will eventually annihilate and exile His people for defecting to idolatry after their conquest of the Land. In the Haftarah, Jeremiah describes the coming brutal fulfillment of that prophecy.

In God's voice and with his own blistering words, Jeremiah lambasts Judah for its idolatry, deceit, and treachery. People slander and scheme against one another; after many generations, the trust and knowledge of God that undergirds society are destroyed. God, therefore, has no choice but to utterly devastate Judah, its cities, and its residents. The approaching destruction shakes the Land and terrifies the people. Foreigners will exile and further torment the few survivors. Some verses portray Judah as understanding all of this as God's planned punishment, but others show them actively rejecting these ideas.

The Haftarah is a kaleidoscope of despair, switching rapidly and without clear differentiation between the distraught perspectives and actions of Jeremiah, the people, and God; these are marked below in purple. In Jeremiah's despair, he envisions and bewails God's destruction, is physically discomforted, wishes to abandon his people, and cries until out of tears. The people's despair causes them, variously, to vainly seek protection in walled cities, to feel shame at the loss of their Land, and to pointlessly confess their sin. God summons expert women mourners to magnify the public despair with lamentations, wailing, and crying.

The Haftarah concludes with a complete reversal as Jeremiah presents a stirring aspiration.¹ Instead of measuring themselves by wealth, strength, or intellect, the people must pursue knowledge of God and found society upon kindness, justice, and righteousness.

Haftarah Breakdown

Likely speakers of the Haftarah's alternating perspectives are noted in purple.

Verses 8:13-17: God is sending Babylon to utterly destroy Judah. Terrorized by the approaching danger, Judah recognizes that God is punishing their sins, and seeks refuge in fortified cities, but God and Jeremiah state that this will not save them. (13- God; 14-15, Judah; 16- Jeremiah/Judah; 17- God)

| | |
|--|---|
| Jeremiah 8:13 | ירמיהו ח:י"ג |
| “I will surely consume them,” says the Lord. “There shall be no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade. What I have given them, shall pass away from them.” | אֶסֶף אֶסְיֵפֶם נְאֻם־יְהוָה אֵינִי עֹנְבִים בְּגִפְנֵי וְאֵין תְּאֵנִים בְּתֵאנָה וְהָעֵלֶה נָבֵל וְאַתֶּן לָהֶם יַעֲבְרוּם: |

Verses 8:18-23: Judeans have been slaughtered. Having angered God, nothing or no one can save them now; the time for salvation or healing has passed. Jeremiah wishes he could cry endlessly, and bewails the destruction. (18- Jeremiah; 19a- Judah; 19b- God; 20- Judah; 21-23, Jeremiah)

| | |
|--|--|
| Jeremiah 8:21 | ירמיהו ח:כ"א |
| Oh, were one to turn my [Jeremiah's] head into water and my eyes into a fountain of tears, I would cry day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! | מֵי־יָתֵן רֹאשִׁי מַיִם וְעֵינַי מְקוֹר דְּמָעָה וְאֶבְכֶּה יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה אֶת חַלְלֵי בַת־עַמִּי: {ס} |

¹ Ashkenazim, who until this point have recited the Haftarah with Eicha's mournful melody, here switch to the ordinary Haftarah melody.

Verses 9:1-5: Jeremiah wishes he could flee to the wilderness to escape Judah's lies, cheating, slander, deceit, adultery, and treachery. They refuse to know God, and must protect themselves from one another.

(1- Jeremiah; 2-4, Jeremiah/God; 5- God)

| | |
|--|---|
| Jeremiah 9:3 | ירמיהו ט:ג |
| A man must guard himself from his neighbor. You must not trust in any brother. For every brother acts deceitfully, and every neighbor goes about with slander. | אִישׁ מִרְעוּלוֹ הַשְּׁמָרוּ וְעַל-כָּל-אָח אֶל-תִּבְטְחוּ כִּי כָל-אָח עָקוֹב וְעַל־רֵעַ רָגִיל יִהְיֶה: |

Verses 9:6-8: God exclaims the impossibility of not punishing His nation of schemers. (God)

| | |
|--|---|
| Jeremiah 9:8 | ירמיהו ט:ח |
| “Shall I not punish them for these things?” says the Lord. “Shall My soul not avenge itself on a nation such as this?” | הֲעַל-אֲלֵה לֹא-אֶפְקֹדֵבֶם נְאֻם-יְהוָה אִם בְּגוֹי אֲשֶׁר-כָּזָה לֹא תִנְגַּם נַפְשִׁי: (ס) |

Verses 9:9-15: Even as Jeremiah mourns God's imminent desolation of Judah, it still fails to understand its downfall's cause: for generations, they abandoned Torah in favor of stubbornness and idolatry. God will exile and further persecute survivors among unknown nations. (9- Jeremiah; 10- God; 11- Jeremiah; 12-15, God)

| | |
|---|--|
| Jeremiah 9:15 | ירמיהו ט:ט"ו |
| I will scatter them among the nations, whom neither they nor their fathers have known; and I will send the sword after them until I have consumed them. | וְהִפְצֹתִים בְּגוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדְעוּ הֵמָּה וְאֲבוֹתָם וְשִׁלַּחְתִּי אַחֲרֵיהֶם אֶת-הַחֶרֶב עַד כִּלּוֹתִי אוֹתָם: |

Verses 9:16-21: God summons wailing women and their daughters to hurry and lead all in grieving the destruction as well as the shame of Jerusalem's abandonment of the Land. God will destroy all human life, leaving no one to collect corpses of all ages rotting in the streets. (16-17, God, 18-20, Judah; 21- God)

| | |
|---|---|
| Jeremiah 9:19 | ירמיהו ט:י"ט |
| Indeed, O women, hear the Lord's word, and let your ears receive His His mouth's word. Teach your daughters a lamentation, and each woman to her neighbor, a dirge. | כִּי-שָׁמַעְנָה נְשִׁים דְּבַר-יְהוָה וְתַקַּח אָזְנוֹכֶם דְּבַר-פִּי וְלַמְדֵנָה בְּנוֹתֵיכֶם נְהִי וְאִשָּׁה רַעוּתָה קִינָה: |

Verses 9:22-23: Aside from knowing God and acting accordingly, all other human values- wisdom, strength, and wealth- are not praiseworthy. (God)

| | |
|--|---|
| Jeremiah 9:23 | ירמיהו ט:כ"ג |
| “But let him that glories, glory in this: that he understands and knows Me, for I am the Lord Who carries out kindness, justice and righteousness on the earth, for in these things I delight”, says the Lord. | כִּי אִם-בְּאֵת יִתְהַלַּל הַמְתַּהַלֵּל הַשֹּׁכֵל וְיִדְעֵ אֹתִי כִּי אֲנִי ה' עֹשֶׂה תְּסֻד מִשְׁפָּט וְצִדְקָה בְּאָרֶץ כִּי-בְּאֵלֵה תִפְצְתִי נְאֻם-יְהוָה |

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