THIRD HAFTARAH OF CONSOLATION

HAFTARAH FOR R'EIH

ISAIAH 54:11-55:5

(Recite on the 3rd Shabbat after the 9th of Av, coinciding with the reading of R'eiḥ. On the Seven Haftarot of Consolation, see p. 1032.)

Bold promises of physical and spiritual transformation introduce this passage from Isaiah. They are presented in unilateral terms. Nothing is demanded of the people. God promises a spectacular rebuilding of Zion, a thorough restoration to raise it out of a depressing situation (54:11-12). And Zion’s children will be transformed into disciples of the Lord, who will protect them (vv. 13–17).

The second part of the haftarah (55:1–5) speaks a more bilateral relationship. Repeatedly God calls on the nation to turn to Him: “Give heed to Me”; “Incline your ear and come to Me.” Spiritual transformation, a condition for renewal, promises true sustenance: “Hearken, and you shall be revived” (v. 3). Then Israel will lead other nations (vv. 4–5).

A rhetoric of assurance features the Hebrew particle hinnei or hen (behold, surely). In the first part it emphasizes freedom from fear (54:15). Although the translation does not render it directly, this particle also punctuates the promise of Zion’s riches and highlights Israel’s new role among the nations (54:11,16; 55:4,5). In the Hebrew text, it both evokes the immediacy of God’s presence and creates an insistent, decisive tone.

Modulation from Israel’s disconsolate condition to one of confidence in God’s creative reality is underscored by the Hebrew particle lo (no, not). It also highlights the nation’s shift from a lack of life’s essentials to bounty, and from discomfort among other nations to being their commander (54:14,17; 55:2,5).

54 11 Unhappy, storm-tossed one, unfortified!
I will lay carbuncles as your building stones
And make your foundations of sapphires.
12 I will make your battlements of rubies,
Your gates of precious stones,
The whole encircling wall of gems.
13 And all your children shall be disciples of the LORD.
And great shall be the happiness of your children.

your children. Hebrew: bannayikh, spelled בנויה. In a well-known midrash, the second in-
14. You shall be established through righteousness:
You shall be safe from oppression,
And shall have no fear.
From ruin, and it shall not come near you.
Surely no harm can be done.
Without My consent:
Whoever would harm you
Shall fall because of you.
It is I who created the smith
To fan the charcoal fire
And produce the tools for his work;
So it is I who create
The instruments of havoc.
No weapon formed against you
Shall succeed;
And every tongue that contends with you at law
You shall defeat.
Such is the lot of the servants of the Lord,
Such their triumph through Me
declares the Lord.

55
Ho, all who are thirsty,
Come for water.
Even if you have no money;
Come, buy food and eat:
Buy food without money,
Wine and milk without cost.
Why do you spend money for what is not bread,
spelling is יבנה in the large Isaiah scroll from Qumran (the “Dead Sea Scrolls”), which supports the midrashic vocalization bonayikh. However, this spelling may equally indicate that the original sense was “your learned ones” (from the root יְבִין to know”). If so, this noun would thus parallel “disciples of the Lord” in the first part of the verse.

14. You shall be established through righteousness: This phrase recalls Isa. 1:27, “Zion shall be redeemed with justice; / Her repentant ones with righteousness” (see Comment, p. 1004). In this case, however, the divine word conveys assurance, not a condition to be fulfilled.

17. triumph Hebrew: tz’dakah, justification or vindication in court. Here it counterpoints the opening clause of the verse. God brings triumph as the vindicator of Israel. Both senses of the word recur in Isa. 40-66 (see 42:21, 45:25, 50:8, 58:2, 63:1).

Isaiah 55:1. thirsty Lacking divine instruction (see Amos 8:11).
Your earnings for what does not satisfy?
Give heed to Me,
And you shall eat choice food
And enjoy the richest viands.
Incline your ear and come to Me;
Hearken, and you shall be revived.
And I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
The enduring loyalty promised to David.
As I made him a leader of peoples,
A prince and commander of peoples,
So you shall summon a nation you did not know,
And a nation that did not know you
Shall come running to you—for the sake of the Lord your God,
The Holy One of Israel who has glorified you.

3. enduring loyalty promised to David The royal covenant given to David (2 Sam. 7:15) is now transferred to the entire people. Here bemed (enduring loyalty) means faithfulness to that covenant.

4. leader Hebrew: ed, literally, “witness.” The figure “leader of peoples” combines images of Israel’s mission as a “light of nations” and “witnesses” to God’s power (see 42:7, 43:10).