

הַפְּטָרָה לַשַּׁבָּת הַגָּדוֹל

HAFTARAH FOR SHABBAT HA-GADOL

MALACHI 3:4-24

This *haftarah* contains God's promise to the people in the period after the rebuilding of the Temple in 516-15 B.C.E. The prophet announces that sacrificial offerings will again be favorably received by God, as in ancient times. First, however, God will contend with the nation's breach of moral and ritual law and bring sinners to judgment. Hope lies in repentance and in observance of the Torah. God's call to the people through Malachi, the healing mission of Elijah, and the teaching of Moses all show God's continual concern for reconciliation and human welfare.

Restoration is the recurrent theme of this *haftarah*: the restoration of acceptable offerings in the Temple (3:4), the repair of the Covenant through repentance (v. 7), the renewal of trust in divine justice (v. 18), and the reconciliation of parents and children (v. 24). Most of these statements include variations of the verb *shuv* (turn, return). Presumably, a crisis of trust in God's just providence has perverted the people's soul, leading to callous indifference in the moral and cultic realms. The *haftarah* is thus pervaded by a deep sense of estrangement from the right order of things, whether in the family, in society, or in the divine-human relationship.

In a rebuke that precedes the *haftarah*, the people are quoted as saying that "All who do evil are good in the sight of the LORD." Indeed, they mockingly jibe, "Where is the God of justice [*mishpat*]?" (Mal. 2:17). In response, God comes to redress the cause of *mishpat* (judgment) in verse 3:5, in which the literal "bring to judgment" is understood as "to contend against you." God will also attend to the sense of the God-fearers that "It is useless to serve God" (v. 14). Actions have consequences. If the people repent and serve God fully, they will receive the riches of heavenly blessing. Otherwise, they will be blasted to ash—root and branch. So deep is the people's resistance that God finally announces He will send His prophet

Elijah to renew their hearts. This unilateral act is proof of God's love of Jacob (announced at the beginning of the collected prophecies of Malachi).

This is Malachi's message of hope. The framers of the biblical canon, placing Malachi as the last of the prophets, believed it to be a final prophetic word to those for whom Scripture teaches divine truth.

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

The phrase *shabbat ha-gadol* (the great Sabbath) is a fixed formulation of rabbinic liturgy, found in the Grace after Meals in the special supplication for *Shabbat* (beginning *r'tzei*). In that context, it emphasizes the special holiness of each *Shabbat*. The term also traditionally designates the *Shabbat* before *Pesah*. Its meaning in this setting is uncertain, which has elicited much speculation.

One likely explanation for the choice of Mal. 3:4-24 as the *haftarah* for *Shabbat ha-Gadol* is the old tradition that the future redemption will occur on *Pesah*, the prototype of redemption (BT, RH 11a). Because the *haftarah* could be construed to herald God's great day, it is to be proclaimed in hope and in warning before the festival itself. The term *shabbat ha-gadol* would then simply be a shorthand designation for saying that on this *Shabbat* the *haftarah* proclaiming the final "great" (*gadol*) day is read. This is very much like the formulation *Shabbat Shuvah*, which is one way to designate the *Shabbat* before *Yom Kippur*, when the theme of repentance (*t'shuvah*) is stressed through a *haftarah* selection beginning with the word *shuvah* (repent; Hos. 14:2).

The *haftarah*'s focus on the tithe obligations would have reinforced the rabbinic selection. Indeed, according to the Mishnah, "on Passover

(the people) are judged with respect to (their) produce" (MRH I:2). Because the law required tithes from agricultural produce gathered before *Pesah*, recitation of the *haftarah* on the *Shabbat* before the festival would duly warn the people to fulfill their obligations to God and to the poor, and thus merit divine favor in the ensuing year. Our custom of charitable giving (*ma'ot hittim*) at this time, ini-

tiated so that the needy would have grain for *matzah*, continues the relationship between philanthropy and piety at the *Pesah* season. The *haftarah* thus signals that gifts have a divine dimension. From this perspective, *Shabbat ha-Gadol* calls attention to an ultimate or "great" accountability that all creatures bear for the resources of the earth and the sacred task of their redistribution.

3 Surely the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of yore and in the years of old. ⁵But [first] I will step forward to contend against you, and I will act as a relentless accuser against those who have no fear of Me: Who practice sorcery, who commit adultery, who swear falsely, who cheat laborers of their hire, and who subvert [the cause of] the widow, orphan, and stranger, said the LORD of Hosts.

⁶For I am the LORD—I have not changed; and you are the children of Jacob—you have not ceased to be. ⁷From the very days of your fathers you have turned away from My laws and have not observed them. Turn back to Me, and I will turn back to you—said the LORD of Hosts. But you ask, "How shall we turn back?" ⁸Ought man to defraud God? Yet you are defrauding Me. And you ask, "How have we been defrauding You?" In tithe and contribution. ⁹You are suffering under a curse, yet you go on defrauding Me—the whole nation of you. ¹⁰Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, and let there be food in My House, and thus put Me to the test—said the LORD of Hosts. I will surely open the floodgates of the sky for you and pour down blessings on you; ¹¹and I will banish the locusts from you, so that they will not destroy the yield

Malachi 3:5. Who practice sorcery Condemnation of witches and false oaths and of the abuse of widows, orphans, and strangers finds echoes in Exod. 22:17,19–21.

ג ⁴וְעִרְבָה לַיהוָה מִנְחַת יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם כִּימֵי עוֹלָם וּכְשֵׁנִים קְדָמֵינוּת: ⁵וְקָרַבְתִּי אֵלֵיכֶם לְמַשְׁפֵּט וְהִיִּיתִי אֶעֱד מִמֶּהָר בְּמַכְשָׁפִים וּבְמַנְאָפִים וּבְנֹשְׁבְעִים לְשָׁקֵר וּבַעֲשָׂקֵי שְׂכָר־שְׂכִיר אֶלְמָנָה וְיָתוֹם וּמִטִּי־גֵר* וְלֹא יֵרְאוּנִי אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת:

⁶כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה לֹא שֵׁנִיתִי וְאַתֶּם בְּנֵי־יַעֲקֹב לֹא כְלִיתֶם: ⁷לְמִימֵי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם סָרְתֶם מִחֻקִּי וְלֹא שְׁמַרְתֶּם שׁוּבוּ אֵלַי וְאֲשׁוּבָה אֵלֵיכֶם אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת וְאַמַּרְתֶּם בְּמֶה נָשׁוּב: ⁸הֲיִקְבַּע אָדָם אֱלֹהִים כִּי אַתֶּם קֹבְעִים אוֹתִי וְאַמַּרְתֶּם בְּמֶה קֹבְעֵנוּךְ הַמַּעֲשֵׂר וְהַתְרוּמָה: ⁹בְּמַאֲרָה אַתֶּם נֹאֲרִים וְאַתִּי אַתֶּם קֹבְעִים הֲגוֹי כְּלוֹ: ¹⁰הֲבִיאוּ אֶת־כָּל־הַמַּעֲשֵׂר אֶל־בֵּית הָאוֹצֵר וַיְהִי טָרֶךְ בְּבֵיתִי וּבְחֲנוּנֵי נֶאֱבֹאת אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אִם־לֹא אֶפְתַּח לָכֶם אֶת אַרְבוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהִרִיקְתִּי לָכֶם בְּרָכָה עַד־בְּלִי־דֵי: ¹¹וְגַעַרְתִּי לָכֶם בְּאֹכֶל וְלֹא־יִשְׁחַת לָכֶם אֶת־פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה וְלֹא־

v. 5. י' במקום ה'

7. Turn back to Me, and I will turn back to you Malachi's exhortation assumes the people's ability to respond to God's initiative.

of your soil; and your vines in the field shall no longer miscarry—said the LORD of Hosts. ¹²And all the nations shall account you happy, for you shall be the most desired of lands—said the LORD of Hosts.

¹³You have spoken hard words against Me—said the LORD. But you ask, “What have we been saying among ourselves against You?”

¹⁴You have said, “It is useless to serve God. What have we gained by keeping His charge and walking in abject awe of the LORD of Hosts? ¹⁵And so, we account the arrogant happy: they have indeed done evil and endured; they have indeed dared God and escaped.” ¹⁶In this vein have those who revere the LORD been talking to one another. The LORD has heard and noted it, and a scroll of remembrance has been written at His behest concerning those who revere the LORD and esteem His name. ¹⁷And on the day that I am preparing, said the LORD of Hosts, they shall be My treasured possession; I will be tender toward them as a man is tender toward a son who ministers to him. ¹⁸And you shall come to see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between him who has served God and him who has not served Him.

¹⁹For lo! That day is at hand, burning like an oven. All the arrogant and all the doers of evil shall be straw, and the day that is coming—said the LORD of Hosts—shall burn them to ashes and leave of them neither stock nor boughs.

16. those who revere the LORD Hebrew: *yir-ei YHVH*. Used as a technical designation for those who revere God’s name (3:20), in contradistinction to those who despise it (1:6). They shall be vindicated on the day of judgment (3:20–21). Presumably, this refers to a group of particularly pious people.

19. the day that is coming References to the future “day” of judgment punctuate the prophet’s speech (3:2, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23). A complex scenario is envisaged, dominated by the advent of an angelic messenger, the admonition of sins, the in-

תִּשְׁכַּל לְכֶם הַגֶּפֶן בַּשָּׂדֶה אָמַר יְהוָה
צְבָאוֹת: ¹² וְאִשְׁרוּ אֶתְכֶם כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם כִּי-
תִהְיוּ אִתָּם אֶרֶץ חֶפֶץ אָמַר יְהוָה
צְבָאוֹת: ס

¹³ חִזְקוּ עָלַי דְּבַרְיֶכֶם אָמַר יְהוָה וְאִמַּרְתֶּם
מִה-נִּדְבַרְנוּ עֲלֶיהָ: ¹⁴ אָמַרְתֶּם שׂוֹא עֵבֶד
אֱלֹהִים וּמִה-בִּצַע כִּי שָׁמְרָנוּ מִשְׁמֵרֹתוֹ
וְכִי הִלְכְנוּ קְדֻרָנִית מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת:
¹⁵ וְעַתָּה אֲנַחְנוּ מֵאֲשֵׁרִים וְדִים גַּם-נִבְנוּ
עֲשֵׂי רָשָׁעָה גַם בָּחֲנוּ אֱלֹהִים וַיִּמְלְטוּ:
¹⁶ אִזּוֹ נִדְבַרְנוּ יִרְאֵי יְהוָה אִישׁ אֶל-
רֵעֵהוּ וַיִּקְשַׁב יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמַע וַיִּכְתַּב סֵפֶר
וּפְרוֹן לְפָנָיו לִירְאֵי יְהוָה וּלְחֹשְׁבֵי שְׁמוֹ:
¹⁷ וְהָיוּ לִי אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת לְיוֹם אֲשֶׁר
אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה סִגְלָה וְחִמְלָתִי עֲלֵיהֶם:
כִּי אֲשֶׁר יִחְמַל אִישׁ עַל-בְּנוֹ הָעֶבֶד אֲתוֹ:
¹⁸ וְשִׁבְתֶּם וּרְאִיתֶם בֵּין צְדִיק לְרָשָׁע בֵּין
עֶבֶד אֱלֹהִים לְאִשֶׁר לֹא עֲבָדוּ: ס

¹⁹ כִּי-יִהְיֶה הַיּוֹם כָּאֵשׁ בַּעַר כִּתְנוֹר וְהָיוּ
כָּל-יְדָיִם וְכָל-עֹשֶׂה רָשָׁעָה קֶשׁ וְלֹהֵט
אֶתָּם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת
אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יֵעֹזב לָהֶם שְׂרֵשׁ וְעֵנָף: ²⁰ וְזָרְחָה

terventions of Elijah, the fiery purgation of sinners, the vindication of the pious, and the visible distinction between the righteous and evildoers. This scenario was variously explicated and ordered by medieval Jewish commentators, in light of other biblical and Rabbinic evidence. In turn, the images were understood in either literal or figurative terms. The prophet Malachi was himself the heir to a long tradition of this rhetoric, produced in a period of more than 300 years and in various patterns.

