

TLATA DEPURANUTA & SHIVA DENECHENTA

Three Haftarat of Punishment,
Seven Haftarat of Consolation

Consolation, week 2: Across three chapters

“Vatomer Tziyon”

Yeshayahu 49:14-26

All of chapter 50

First 3 verses of chapter 51

That's a lot of text! Let's talk about how the selection is structured.

Fishbane, JPS *Haftarot* volume

PART 1. ZION'S CRY AND GOD'S ASSURANCE (Isaiah 49:14–26)

a. Isaiah 49:14–21 Zion's sense of divine abandonment is enunciated (v. 14) and rejected in God's word of consolation. He could no more forget her than a mother her children; indeed, her walls are engraved on the palms of His hand and thus are always before Him (vv. 15–16). This assurance is complemented by a promise of restoration: Zion's children shall return and her ruins shall be rebuilt.

b. Isaiah 49:22–26 In another pronouncement, God again promises the return of the dispersed—this time brought home by the nations themselves. God swears His active involvement: against Zion's “adversaries” and for her “children.”

PART 2. CHALLENGE TO THE PEOPLE (Isaiah 50:1–51:3)

a. Isaiah 50:1–3 The divine consolation now turns to challenge and rebuke. First, God tells the people that they have not been rejected, for indeed, though He came, there “was no one there” (v. 2). The people did not respond to the divine word of redemption and return. God's powers were never in doubt; hence the people's lack of responsiveness is the issue—not divine indifference.

b. Isaiah 50:4–11 The prophet now asserts that he himself has been responsive to the divine word but has suffered for it grievously (vv. 4–9). The prophet further challenges the people to be faithful and dooms their rebellion (vv. 10–11).

c. Isaiah 51:1–3 The haftarah concludes on a conciliatory note. The prophet tells the people that they may draw confidence from God's care for Abraham—for though he was only one when called to come to the Land, he responded and became a mighty nation through Sarah and their

Childs even groups this all together

Remember that Childs is a running commentary on the whole sefer of Yeshayahu, not addressed to the haftara cycle whatsoever. So it's interesting to see him render the structure of this section in his commentary: He groups Isaiah 49:14 through the end of the chapter with 50:1-11. In other words, even without appeal to the haftara traditions, he sees a throughline here (leaving aside 51:1-3).

51. Isaiah 49:14–50:11

49:14 But Zion says,
The LORD has forsaken me,
my God has forgotten me.”

The lead-in

We don't read the beginning of Chapter 49. But let's be aware of what leads in to the section we do read:

49:1-6 is one of the **servant songs** found in the latter portion of Yeshayahu, dramatizing the prophet's calling and mission

49:7-12 is an address to the people from God encouraging faith in the restoration

V13 is a brief hymn of joy closing that section.

It ends "The LORD has comforted His people, and taken back His afflicted ones in love."

Fishbane:

In context, Hebrew *va-to'mer tzion* is literally "But Zion said" (OJPS) —a statement that rebuts or rejects the immediately preceding assertion that "the LORD has comforted His people, and has taken back His afflicted ones in love" (Isa. 49:13).⁷ In the haftarah, however, verse 14 is now set off from this context and given an independent status. In this way, the phrase loses its polemical tone and gains one of pathos and despair.

The city laments; God responds

14 Zion says,
"The LORD has forsaken me,
My Lord has forgotten me."
15 Can a woman forget her baby,
Or disown the child of her womb?
Though she might forget,
I never could forget you.
16 See, I have engraved you
On the palms of My hands,
Your walls are ever before Me.
17 Swiftly your children are coming;
Those who ravaged and ruined you shall leave
you.
18 Look up all around you and see:
They are all assembled, are come to you!

As I live

—declares the LORD—

You shall don them all like jewels,
Deck yourself with them like a bride.
19 As for your ruins and desolate places
And your land laid waste—
You shall soon be crowded with settlers,
While destroyers stay far from you.
20 The children ^byou thought you had lost ^b
Shall yet say in your hearing,
"The place is too crowded for me;
Make room for me to settle."
21 And you will say to yourself,
"Who bore these for me
When I was bereaved and barren,

Exiled and disdained^a—
By whom, then, were these reared?
I was left all alone—
And where have these been?"

Some observations

“Can a woman forget her baby, or disown the child of her womb?” is set up as a rhetorical question prompting the initial reaction “why, of course not!” That expectation is reversed, however: Yes, a woman “might” indeed do such a thing. It is an unfortunate feature of the human condition. **But God never could forget.**

God has engraved the image of the city on “the palms of His hands.” This is a powerfully anthropomorphic image. It relates God to our human experience. A mother can even forget her child! Humans have to write things on themselves in tattoo to “always remember” - this verse says that kavyachol, God is like a human who has overcome the weakness of forgetting through determined action.

“Your walls are ever before Me,” says God. **God remembers the city as it was when its walls were standing and its people were thriving.**

The reframed metaphor of the lost child

14 Zion says,
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My Lord has forgotten me."
15 Can a woman forget her baby,
Or disown the child of her womb?
Though she might forget,
I never could forget you.
16 See, I have engraved you
On the palms of My hands,
Your walls are ever before Me.
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You shall don them all like jewels,
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"Who bore these for me
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Exiled and disdained^a—
By whom, then, were these reared?
I was left all alone—
And where have these been?"

We open with Zion as the lost child. Then God says a human mother might in rare cases forget or disown her child, but God will not, and in fact God will reverse the loss. God, furthermore, does not only remain mindful of Zion (His child in the metaphor), but serves as mother to Zion's own lost children until they can be returned to her.

Verse 17: “Swiftly your WHAT?”

17. *Swiftly your children* “Your children,” Hebrew *banayikh*. The large Isaiah scroll at Qumran reads *bonayikh*, “your builders.”¹¹ The term is juxtaposed to “those who ravaged and ruined you.” A similar reading is indicated by R. Saadiah Gaon.

a. It is possible that a double reading (“sons”/“builders”) is preserved in the consonants. The NRSV follows the second alternative. Cf. the exposition and *BHS*.

Two themes are artfully intertwined in vv. 17 and 18: the return of the children and the rebuilding of the walls. In fact, some have argued that in the Hebrew consonants of *bnayk* (v. 17) a double reading is retained, namely, the MT pointing *bānāyik* (“sons”) and the Greek and Qumran rendering *bōnayik* (“builders”). The reference to the children returning continues in vv. 18, 20–22, whereas the restoration of Zion picks up the theme of the walls in v. 16 and extends the imagery into v. 19. Zion, the bereaved mother, is admonished simply to look. The scattered children are assembling. They come to be worn like jewels for a bride. With a note of exuberant celebration, Zion’s children announce that they need more room to accommodate their sheer numbers. Then in astonishment the barren mother will exclaim: “Whoever bore me these? I was bereaved and sterile. . . . [W]ho has brought them up? I was left standing all alone, but from where have these come?” Those who once inflicted Israel with devastation (vv. 17 and 19) will simply disappear from the joyous scene.

Remainder of ch49 – Fishbane:

- 22 Thus said the Lord God:
I will raise My hand to nations
And lift up My ensign to peoples;
And they shall bring your sons in their bosoms,
And carry your daughters on their backs.
- 23 Kings shall tend your children,
Their queens shall serve you as nurses.
They shall bow to you, face to the ground,
And lick the dust of your feet.
And you shall know that I am the LORD—
Those who trust in Me shall not be shamed.
- 24 Can spoil be taken from a warrior,
Or captives retrieved from a victor?
- 25 Yet thus said the LORD:
Captives shall be taken from a warrior
And spoil shall be retrieved from a tyrant;
For I will contend with your adversaries,
And I will deliver your children.
- 26 I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh,
They shall be drunk with their own blood as with
wine.
And all mankind shall know
That I the LORD am your Savior,
The Mighty One of Jacob, your Redeemer.

The second rhetorical question is also designed to counter unwarranted assumptions. Promises of a national restoration accompanied by foreign kings tending Israelite children and foreign queens serving as their nursemaids (Isa. 49:22–23) might seem excessive. They are therefore reinforced by the query “Can spoil be taken from a warrior, or captives retrieved from a victor?” (v. 24). With little faith or normal instincts, one could be skeptical on this score. Hence the uncompromising conclusion, which begins in a way that seems to confirm this assumption—but then reverses it in no uncertain terms. “Captives shall be taken from a warrior and spoil shall be retrieved from a tyrant”; because it is the Lord who will contend for His people (v. 25). In His great might, success is assured.

First rhetorical question: Can a woman forget her child? Answer: Actually, yes, but not God.

Second rhetorical question: Can captives and loot be recovered from victorious warriors? Answer: Actually, yes, but only because of God.

Sound familiar?

For *I* will contend with your adversaries,
And *I* will deliver your children.

26 I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh,
They shall be drunk with their own blood as with
wine.

50: God's power and the prophet as role model for the people

50 Thus said the LORD:
1 ^aWhere is the bill of divorce
Of your mother whom I dismissed?
And which of My creditors was it
To whom I sold you off?
You were only sold off for your sins,
And your mother dismissed for your crimes.
2 Why, when I came, was no one there,
Why, when I called, would none respond?
Is my arm, then, too short to rescue,
Have I not the power to save?
With a mere rebuke I dry up the sea,
And turn rivers into desert.

Their fish stink from lack of water;
They lie dead ^aof thirst. ^a

3 I clothe the skies in blackness
And make their raiment sackcloth.

4 ^bThe Lord God gave me a skilled tongue,
To know how to speak timely words to the weary. ^b
Morning by morning, He rouses,
He rouses my ear
To give heed like disciples.
5 The Lord God opened my ears,
And I did not disobey,
I did not run away.
6 I offered my back to the floggers,
And my cheeks to those who tore out my hair.
I did not hide my face
From insult and spittle. 10
7 But the Lord God will help me—
Therefore I feel no disgrace;
Therefore I have set my face like flint,
And I know I shall not be shamed.
8 My Vindicator is at hand—
Who dares contend with me?
Let us stand up together! ^c
Who would be my opponent?
Let him approach me!
9 Lo, the Lord God will help me—
Who can get a verdict against me?
They shall all wear out like a garment,
The moth shall consume them.

10 Who among you reveres the LORD
And heeds the voice of His servant?—
Though he walk in darkness
And have no light,
Let him trust in the name of the LORD
And rely upon his God.
11 But you are all kindlers of fire,
^dGirding on ^dfirebrands.
Walk by the blaze of your fire,
By the brands that you have lit!
This has come to you from My hand:
^bYou shall lie down in pain. ^b

Jewish Study Bible commentary

50.1–51.8: A response to the nation's tribulations. God addresses the Israelites' despair at their plight. The previous section described Deutero-Isaiah's own prophetic mission (which is ultimately the mission of the whole nation) and proceeded to relay God's message to the city of Jerusalem. Similarly, this passage describes Deutero-Isaiah's mission (which is a model for all Israel) while relaying a divine message to the nation. **50.1–3: The relationship between God and Israel endures.** **1:** The Israelites viewed themselves metaphorically as God's wife and also as God's children. If the former, they worry that God has divorced them and therefore cannot take them back (cf. Jer. 3.1; Deut. 24.1–4). If the latter, then God has sold them away (cf. Exod. 21.7–11; 2 Kings 4.1). But God insists that no divorce has taken place, and that the children remain God's own property. **2:** Behind

4–11: The mission of the prophet and of the nation. As in 49.1–6, Deutero-Isaiah speaks in the first person. By doing so the prophet sets a model that the nation as a whole should follow, since the whole nation has a prophetic role to the world at large. **4–5:** The prophet is a disciple of older prophets, constantly borrowing their words and noting how their predictions proved true. **6–9:** Deutero-Isaiah, like all Israelites, suffered in the exile. But Deutero-Isaiah knows the punishment meted out to the exiles was just, accepts it, and awaits the vindication that surely follows. **10–11:** Israel's response: Some of Deutero-Isaiah's listeners will accept both divine punishment and divine reward, but others will continue to reject God's word, to their own detriment.

Fishbane

Isaiah 50:1. Where is the bill of divorce . . . ? Hebrew *sefer keritut*.¹² The question is rhetorical. No divorce took place; there was only a temporary dismissal for sins. By contrast, the theme of God's divorce of Israel recurs in Hosea 2; Jer. 3:1, 6–10; and Ezekiel 16 and 23. Traditional commentators resolved the contradiction by distinguishing between God's divorce of the northern tribes of Israel (many of which did not return to the homeland) and His banishment of Judah until the time of their reconciliation (Ibn Ezra; Kimhi). The marriage motif also underlies God's promised reconciliation with the people (Isa. 54:4–7) and the Land (62:3–5).

8. *Let us stand up together!* That is, as opponents in court; compare Num. 35:12, which speaks of standing trial “before the assembly”

וְהָיוּ לָכֶם הָעָרִים לְמִקְלָט מִגֹּאֵל וְלֹא
יָמוּת הָרֹצֵחַ עַד-עֲמֻדוֹ לִפְנֵי הָעֵדָה
לְמִשְׁפָּט:¹² The cities shall serve you as a refuge
from the avenger,^c so that the
manslayer may not die unless there is a
trial before the assembly.

Another example not noted
either here or in the Jewish
Study Bible: Devarim 19:17

וְעָמְדוּ שְׁנֵי־הָאָנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־לָהֶם הָרִיב
לִפְנֵי יְהוָה לִפְנֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים וְהַשֹּׁפְטִים
אֲשֶׁר יִהְיוּ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא:¹⁷ the two parties to the dispute shall
appear before GOD, before the priests
or magistrates in authority at the time,

Childs reminds us that 50 follows on 49:1-13

“Earlier (49:4) [the servant/prophet] had confessed his failure to persuade a resisting people. Now (50:6) the negative response intensifies into physical violence from which the servant did not retreat.

Verse 6 recounts the full scope of his oppression: he was beaten, insulted, and he submitted to the vilest outrages of physical humiliation. Isaiah 49:7 had spoken of his being deeply despised and abhorred. In 50:6 the horrible details are portrayed.

However, v. 6 serves only as a backdrop for the climax of the servant’s confession of trust in God. Once again he bears testimony to [God] who sustains him. “Therefore I have not been disgraced. Therefore I have set my face like a flint” (v. 7).

In 49:4 the servant testified that “my case is in the LORD’s hand.” In 50:8 he returns to the same theme. God who vindicates him is present. Three resounding and defiant expressions of his confidence follow: “Who dares contend with me?” “Who is my accuser?” “Who can condemn me?” The confession of unswerving trust ends on the assured note that his oppressors will be exhausted and devoured.”

Finally, 51:1-3

- 51 Listen to Me, you who pursue justice,
You who seek the LORD:
Look to the rock you were hewn from,
To the quarry you were dug from.
- 2 Look back to Abraham your father
And to Sarah who brought you forth.
For he was only one when I called him,
But I blessed him and made him many.
- 3 Truly the LORD has comforted Zion,
Comforted all her ruins;
He has made her wilderness like Eden,
Her desert like the Garden of the LORD.
Gladness and joy shall abide there,
Thanksgiving and the sound of music.

51.1-8: An exhortation to Israelites who despair. Four brief statements explain why the nation's current state is not a cause for hopelessness. Each statement opens with an imperative verb addressed to the Israelites. **1-3:** The example of Abraham and Sarah: they, like the current Israelites, were few in number, yet God multiplied their descendants. **4-5:** God is the source of teaching, and thus God can indeed save. **4:** *Teaching*, Heb "torah." Cf. Isa. 2.3. **6-7:** Two metaphors emphasize the enduring nature of the salvation that God brings.

Fishbane:

Isaiah 51:1. Look to the rock According to Joseph ibn Kaspi, verse 1 constitutes a *mashal* (parable) and verse 2 (applying the imagery to Abraham and Sarah) its *nimshal* (application).¹³ Rashi, Kimhi, and Ibn Ezra understood a similar relationship between the verses.

Fishbane (I have abridged his formulation):

Echoing the despair that concludes Lamentations on Tisha b'Av, "Why have You forgotten us utterly, forsaken us for all time?", Zion is cited as saying, "The LORD has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me."

This assertion is rejected. Even if "a woman forget her baby" the Lord "never could forget" Zion. This poignantly reminds readers of the siege ("babes and sucklings languish in the city squares... as their life runs out in their mothers' bosoms"), and even more horrible, the accusation that God's wrath caused "women [to] eat their own offspring." (See Lamentations chapter 2)

[Yet] if once it seemed that the Lord "acted like a foe" and "laid waste all [Zion's] **citadels**"(Lam. 2:5), He now asserts that "your **walls** are ever before Me"—for indeed, "I have engraved you on the palms of My hands."

One more comparison to Lamentations: God's "hands"

3

אֲנִי הַגִּבֹּר רָאָה עָנִי בְּשֹׁבֶט
עֲבָרָתוֹ: {ס}

1 I am the man^a who has known
affliction

Under^b the rod of God's wrath;

אוֹתִי נָהַג וַיִּלֶּךְ חֹשֶׁךְ וְלֹא-
אֹר: {ס}

2 It is I who was driven on and on
In unrelieved darkness;

אֵף בִּי יֹשֵׁב יִהְיֶה יָדוֹ כָּל-
הַיּוֹם: {ס}

3 On none but me God's hand
descends

Again and again, without cease.

הֵן עַל-כַּפַּיִם חֲקַתֶּיךָ חוֹמַתֶּיךָ נִגְדִי
תַּמִּיד:

16 See, I have engraved you

On the palms of My hands,

Your walls are ever before Me. 22

Thus said the Lord God:

I will raise My hand to nations

And lift up My ensign to peoples;

And they shall bring your sons in their bosoms,

And carry your daughters on their backs.



Lamentations 1
Revised JPS, 2023



נִשְׁקָדָה עַל פִּשְׁעֵי בִידּוֹ יִשְׁתַּרְגֵּוּ עָלָיו
עַל-צִוְּאָרָי הַכְּשִׁיל כָּחִי נִתְּנָנִי אֲדָנִי
בִּידֵי לֹא-אוֹכֵל קוֹם: {ס}

1^j The yoke of my offenses is
bound fast,
Lashed tight by God's hand;
Imposed upon my neck,
It saps my strength;
The Sovereign has delivered me
into the hands
Of those I cannot withstand.

I Samuel 12:15

וְאִם־לֹא תִשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֲתֵּיכֶם וְהָיְתָה יְדֵיכֶם בְּכֶם וּבְאֵבְתֵיכֶם:
Miqra according to the Masorah
3 MORE VERSIONS

I Samuel 5:6

וְתִכְבַּד יְדֵי אֱלֹהֵי־אֲשֻׁדּוּדִים וַיִּשְׁמַם וַיָּךְ אֹתָם [בְּשַׁחֲרִים] אֶת־אֲשֻׁדּוּד וְאֶת־גְּבוּלֵיהֶ:
Miqra according to the Masorah
3 MORE VERSIONS

I Samuel 7:13

וַיִּכְנְעוּ הַפְּלִשְׁתִּים וְלֹא־יָסְפוּ עוֹד לְבֹא בְּגְבוּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְתָהִי יְדֵי בְּפִלְשְׁתִּים כֹּל יְמֵי שְׁמוּאֵל:
Miqra according to the Masorah
3 MORE VERSIONS

I Samuel 5:9

וְהָיָה אַחֲרֵי הַסָּבוּ אֹתוֹ וְתָהִי יְדֵי בַעִיר מֵהוּמָה גְּדוֹלָה מְאֹד וַיָּךְ אֶת־אֲנָשֵׁי הָעִיר מִקֶּשֶׁן וְעַד־גְּדוֹל וַיִּשְׁתְּרוּ לָהֶם [שַׁחֲרִים]:
Miqra according to the Masorah
3 MORE VERSIONS

Compare:

Exodus 9
Revised JPS, 2023

הָיָה יְדֵי הוֹיָה בְּמִקְנֶה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה בְּסוֹסִים בְּחֻמְרִים בְּגִמְלִים בְּבָקָר וּבִצְאָן דָּבָר כְּבֵד מְאֹד: then GOD's hand will strike your livestock in the fields—the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the cattle, and the sheep—with a very severe pestilence.

Deuteronomy 2
Revised JPS, 2023

וְגַם יְדֵי הָיְתָה בָּם לְהַמָּם מִקֶּרֶב הַמַּחֲנֶה עַד תֵּמָּם: Indeed, GOD's hand struck them, to root them out from the camp until they were finished off.

Judges 2
Revised JPS, 2023

בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר יֵצְאוּ יְדֵי הָיְתָה־בָּם לְרָעָה כְּאֲשֶׁל דָּבָר וְכַאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לָהֶם וַיַּצֵּר לָהֶם מְאֹד: In all their campaigns, GOD's hand was against them to their undoing—as GOD had declared and as GOD had sworn to them—and they were in great distress.

Ruth 1
Revised JPS, 2023

there was hope for me, even if I were married tonight and I also bore sons, הָיִיתִי הַלַּיְלָה לְאִישׁ וְגַם יִלְדֹתִי בָנִים:

13 הֲלֵהוּן תִּשְׁפְּרְנָה עַד אֲשֶׁר יִגְדְּלוּ הֲלֵהוּן תַּעֲנֶנָּה לְבִלְתִּי הָיוֹת לְאִישׁ אֶל בְּנֹתַי כִּי־מֵרִלִי מְאֹד מִכֶּם כִּי־צָאָה כִּי יְדֵי:

should you wait for them to grow up? Should you on their account debar yourselves from marriage? Oh no, my daughters! My lot is far more bitter than yours, for GOD's hand has struck out against me."

Granted: Yad Hashem is not always disastrous

In Yechezkel, four times, it refers to the spirit of prophecy touching the titular prophet: “God’s hand was upon me.”

In Melachim, where it occurs once, it refers to the same for Elisha: “God’s hand came upon him as the musician played.”

In Iyyov, where it occurs once, it seems neutral.

But in all cases, **Yad Hashem is a phrase invoking limitless and enduring power.**

We know what can happen when humans encounter the Hand of God: transcendent experiences that are often devastating.

What does it mean that God encounters His own hands?

God confronts Himself! He looks at His hands and sees Zion (49:16); then He raises up His hand to the nations to bid them return Zion’s children to her (v22).