

Haftarat Ki Tavo כִּי תָבוֹא

Torah: Deuteronomy 26:1–29:8

Haftarah: Isaiah 60:1–22

The Light That Shined in the Darkness

General Overview

Who turned on the lights! That is the reaction anyone might have when they come to this haftarah. Whereas, in most of the other passages in Isaiah there is a healthy mixture of rebuke and comfort, this one is different. All throughout this passage, Isaiah has nothing but excitement in anticipation of the great and glorious things that will happen to his people in the future.

Which future does Isaiah have in mind? It is obvious that Isaiah is looking far into his own distant future. None of the blessings that are predicted here can fit into any time period of Israel's history, as we know it today. Therefore, it is generally assumed that Isaiah is looking forward to the millennium.

What blessings await Israel during the millennium? According to this haftarah, there will be a complete restoration of Israel to the place of spiritual leadership that she once enjoyed in her early years. In fact, it will be even better! Among other things, the nations will bless Israel and her descendants will come back to the Land to walk in truth and righteousness. In fact, there will even be an abundance of material blessings. In short, this is one of those passages that sounds too good to be true — but because the Holy One of Israel promises it, it will be true, and even better than we can ever imagine.

Connection to the Parasha

Parashat Ki Tavo is the sidra in which we find the curses and the blessings. A good portion of Isaiah has been occupied with warning Israel about the curses that are promised to her for covenant disobedience.

This haftarah, however, is different. It speaks of Israel in her glorified state. It shows what God desired a long time ago for the descendants of Jacob. It describes the ultimate blessings in store for Israel — if only Israel will be faithful to the covenant of God.

As it turns out, when this present era draws to a close and King Messiah returns to rule and reign in Jerusalem, God will have done a miraculous work in Israel that will cause them to repent, and will enable her to fully participate in her wonderful, promised covenant blessings. It will be a work of God alone.

Exposition

The outline that has been developed for this passage will follow the flow of the revelation in the passage itself. However, like so many of the other sections in the prophets, sometimes topics are repeated throughout the passage. Hence, the

exposition of this haftarah will not exactly follow verse by verse in the text. With that in mind, here is our expository outline:

- I. Radiance
- II. Restoration
- III. Redemption
- IV. Righteousness

In this excerpt from Haftarat Ki Tavo, we will focus on section I, Radiance.

I. Radiance

A. The Light That Shined in the Darkness

In order to appreciate the full impact of Isaiah 60:1–3, we need to go almost all of the way back to the beginning of Isaiah's prophecy, to chapter 9. The prophet spoke to the people of Israel who were experiencing great darkness. He said,

but there will be no [more] gloom for her who was in anguish. In earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles (Isaiah 9:1–2).

Then, Isaiah speaks of a light that will come to these people:

The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them (Isaiah 9:2).

A few verses later, he tells us from where that light will originate. In doing so, he focuses in on the promised Messiah. We have every reason to believe that Isaiah is still speaking of that same light in the opening verses of our haftarah in chapter 60.

The words follow the huge section in chapters 42–53 that spoke about the Servant/Messiah and the atoning work that He accomplished. At least twice in that section, Isaiah mentioned that in the Servant, Israel would be a light to the nations, hinting that the Servant himself would be that light. For example, read Isaiah 49:6–7 and Isaiah 51:4–5:

It is too small a thing that you should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel. I will also make you a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth. Pay attention to me, O My people; and give ear to me, O My nation; for a law will go forth from me, and I will set My justice for a light of the peoples. My righteousness is near, My salvation has gone forth, and My arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands will wait for me, and for My arm they will wait expectantly.

Now, in verses 60:1–3, Isaiah opens up this passage by proclaiming to Israel that her light has come. Because of that, they were to rise up and greet the Holy One as he comes.

The Lord's glory coming to them is depicted as a bright light. When the text says that their light "has risen upon them," the Hebrew verb is from the root *zarakh*, זָרַח.

It is a verb that is often used to denote the rising of the sun. That, therefore, is a vivid description of how bright the glory of the Lord will be to our eyes.

When Isaiah commands the people to “rise” and “shine,” what he is telling them to do is to rise up out of their gloom and despair and let the bright shining glory of the Lord reflect from them.

There is something else this verb “rise” can tell us. It is used in the Hebrew perfect tense. For those who know Modern Hebrew, it is in the form of the past tense. However, biblical Hebrew does not so much emphasize the *time* of the action as it does the *kind* of action. The perfect tense signifies action that is completed. When used as it frequently is in the prophets, it speaks of a future event’s occurrence that is so certain that it can be seen as if it has already happened. That is the case here in verse 60:1. Isaiah is so certain that the light will come to Israel that he speaks as if it has already arrived.

B. No More Darkness

The need for this light is mentioned in 60:2. Isaiah said that there would be great darkness covering the earth. That certainly was true in Isaiah’s own day, and it will be even greater in the end of days just before the Messiah comes. The text says that a deep darkness will cover the whole earth. The word translated “cover” is a word that expresses an overwhelming covering, as if the whole earth were enveloped with clothing that covered every part of it.¹

But Isaiah says that there will come a light that will rest upon Jerusalem. Whereas, in the wilderness wanderings the light went before and after Israel, in the future, this light will rest upon (*aleikha*, עליך) the people and the Holy City. Herein, the text indicates that it will cause Israel, especially Jerusalem, to become a light shining for the nations, drawing them to it. In the Messiah, Israel will finally fulfil her calling. Israel will be as Buksbazen describes it:

righteousness and God’s favor shining upon redeemed Israel will attract nations from distant lands to walk toward her light. Israel is to be, so to speak, the Pied Piper of the nations for God.²

C. A Different Kind of Radiance

In the first three verses, we saw how the prophet looked forward to the light of Messiah taking His place amidst the people. Beginning in verse 60:4 and continuing for several verses, we read that Israel will shine for a different reason.

In the previous verses, their radiance was attributed to the light of Messiah shining forth from them. In these verses, their radiance will be caused by the joy on their faces as they witness their sons and daughters coming back to the Land.

What a contrast we can see when we compare this passage to a passage in Genesis chapter 13 where God told Abraham to lift up his eyes and see the Promised Land. Now, in the writing of Isaiah, Abraham’s descendants are told to do the same as their father. But, instead of looking over to the Land of promise, as Abraham did, they will already be *living* there, rejoicing at watching their children come home to them from the furthest corners of the earth.

Though it is not stated specifically, we can, perhaps, assume that the dispersed children of Israel are drawn back to the Land guided by the shining light of Messiah.

This scene depicted by Isaiah is an unusual scene of great joy. It pictures the children of Israel being helped by the remnant from among the nations. We cannot help but wonder why it is that the returnees have to be helped back to the Land, even to the point of being physically carried by some. This seems to imply that they will return following a period of great persecution where they come back injured or weary.

Whatever the case, the text tells us that the people of Zion will shine like the sun when they see their people return. One commentator interprets the beginning of verse 60:5 to read that they will “beam with happiness and throb with joy.” While the Hebrew word translated “throb” by some usually means “fear” (from the root *pakhad*, פָּחַד), herein it can be rendered “trembling with joy” or “happy excitement.”³

¹ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (“BDB”), 491.

² Victor Buksbazen, *The Prophet Isaiah*, vol. 2, 456.

³ I. W. Slotki, *Isaiah* (Soncino), 293.