

Haftarat Nitzavim נצבים

Torah: Deuteronomy 29:9–30:20

Haftarah: Isaiah 61:10–63:9

“My Delight is in Her”

General Overview

It seems that whenever we comment on the passages of Isaiah, we always speak in superlatives. We cannot help it! Isaiah is just that kind of book. It is impossible to think about, to write about, or to describe its contents without using the highest kinds of superlatives.

Indeed, Isaiah is the longest of the prophetic books, and it is the most quoted prophetic book in the Brit Hadasha. It also contains the most information about the Messiah than any other prophetic book. Moreover, it is most likely that this book is the source for more Messianic songs that abound in today's congregations than any other part of Scripture, except, perhaps, for the Psalms.

This is especially true for our present haftarah portion. As we were reading through the haftarah, song after song flooded our minds, songs that believers in Yeshua sing frequently, both in Israel and abroad.

Perhaps one reason for most, if not all of these songs, is that this haftarah is an extremely encouraging and hopeful passage. From the opening words “I will rejoice greatly,” to the closing stanzas. “And He lifted them and carried them all the days of old,” this haftarah abounds with descriptions about Israel's national redemption in the Messianic kingdom, including a brief description of the Redeemer Himself, in 63:1–9.

This haftarah is also the last of the “Haftarot of Consolation.” It is traditionally read on the Shabbat just before Rosh Hashanah because, as Rabbi Hertz states it, “The opening words of the haftarah reflect the spiritual exaltation which at that season possesses the soul of the loyal and God-fearing Israelite.”¹

There is a good possibility that originally this haftarah included the first nine verses of chapter 61, as well. It is likely that the rabbis decided to exclude them from the regular haftarah reading because verses 61:1–9 were the very verses that Yeshua read in reference to himself while He was in the synagogue in Nazareth, (see Luke chapter 4).

In today's amended reading schedule of haftarot, Isaiah 61:1–9 is not included. If our assumptions are correct (and they may not be) then it is quite possible that Yeshua was worshipping in the Nazareth synagogue and reading this haftarah on the Shabbat just before Rosh Hashanah.

Connection to the Parasha

Parashat Nitzavim is one of our personal favourite passages in the entire Bible. It contains the conclusion of the list of curses that would befall Israel for their covenant

unfaithfulness, followed by the famous chapter about the three great “returns” in Deuteronomy chapter 30. This haftarah is a further description of the age in which those returns would come to their greatest fruition — the Messianic age.

Exposition

Like so many of the passages in Isaiah chapters 40–66, this is another difficult section to outline. Remember, it was originally sung, not delivered in a lecture hall. However, there is a structure to these verses. There is a flow of thought. We have chosen to describe this flow of thought by utilizing the various descriptive words or images used in this passage for the remnant of God’s people, especially Zion. Thus, the outline for this week’s haftarah is:

- I. “Decked-Out and Adorned”
- II. “My Delight is in Her”
- III. “A City Not Forsaken”
- IV. “My People”

In this excerpt from Haftarat Nitzavim, we will focus on the section, “My Delight is in Her.”

I. “My Delight is in Her”

There is a second description of the future Jerusalem that Isaiah provides for us in this haftarah. It is found in 62:1–5. These verses also describe some of the *results* of Jerusalem being righteous.

A. A Never Resting God

Isaiah confesses that because of this assurance of future righteousness in store for his city and his people, he will not cease to work to that end. He will never stop proclaiming God’s words to them, “until her righteousness goes forth like brightness, and her salvation like a torch that is burning” (62:1).

The text might indicate that Isaiah is the speaker in verse 62:1. However, we assert that Isaiah is speaking on the Lord’s behalf. God is the one who will not be quiet until Jerusalem is established in righteousness. He will continually work to that end.

This verse is also a classic example of the frequent synonymous parallels that so characterize Hebrew poetry. There are two clauses, each in perfect symmetry with the other. Both clauses begin with the word *lema’an* (למען), meaning “on behalf of” or “for the sake of.” Then, the words Zion and Jerusalem are used in each clause respectively. This indicates that both terms refer to the same geographic location —and not to “the church,” as Keil and Delitzsch suppose.² If there is to be any distinction between the words Zion and Jerusalem, perhaps the classic Jewish commentator Malbeim best expresses it when he says,

her righteousness corresponds to “Zion” and “her salvation” corresponds to Jerusalem. Zion was the seat of the Sanhedrin, denoting the justice and the righteousness of the city. Jerusalem was the residential section where the populace lived and there the exiles will be gathered in.³

The parallelism becomes complete when we look at the verbs and their structure. The same negative precedes both verbs, *lo* (לֹא), following the words Zion and Jerusalem. The verbs themselves are conjugated in the *qal* imperfect. This means that the action denoted by the verbs is *incomplete*. For example, God will not keep quiet *until* righteousness and salvation are emanating from the Holy City. Although two different verbs are used, their meanings overlap, further contributing to the symmetry of this parallelism.

The first verb, *echashe* (הִחַשָּׂה), from the root (חַשָּׂה) stresses the fact that God will be still and inactively quiet until His will is established. The second verb, *eshkot* (אִשְׁקוּט), from the root (שְׁקוּט), emphasizes how God will not remain undisturbed until His will takes place in Jerusalem.⁴

Hence, the verse is not merely saying that God will remain still and keep His mouth quiet, but rather that He will be actively doing things behind the scenes *until* His promises of righteousness and salvation are fixed in Jerusalem for the world to behold.

Not only will God make His people righteous, He will also make His city, Jerusalem, righteous and will never rest until that righteousness is the world-renowned hallmark of that city.

B. An International Testimony

The previous paragraph pinpointed the result of God causing Jerusalem to be righteous. It is so that the nations of the whole world will take note of it. Thus, we read:

And the nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; and you will be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord will designate (62:2).

At one time, the nations of the world witnessed the gross idolatry and sin that Israel practiced. In addition, because of her covenant unfaithfulness and the subsequent discipline that God gave her, the nations of the world referred to Jerusalem as “forsaken.” In the future, however, these nations will see her righteousness and they will take note of it. They will then designate Jerusalem by a new name.

Just as in the past Jacob wrestled with the angel of the Lord and was named Israel — a prince with God; so again as a mark of Israel’s new dignity she will receive a new name, which the Lord Himself will designate, a name which will be appropriate to her new stature as a regenerated and holy people.⁵

Although the nations will use a new descriptive name for Jerusalem, they will do so only by the sovereign will of God, perhaps without them even knowing it, God will sovereignly work in them so as to cause them to choose the exact new name that He had designated for His people.

C. A Crown of Beauty

There is a third result of Jerusalem being made righteous. In 62:3, it says that God will make her “a crown of beauty,” and, in parallel “a royal diadem.”

Both phrases together are descriptive of the headgear that kings (as well as bridegrooms) would have worn in Isaiah’s day. The “royal diadem” in particular, was not necessarily a metal crown such as most of us would picture medieval kings wearing, but rather, it was a turban. This verse is descriptive of how royal and beautiful God will make His city and His people. It may also be hinting that God will make the leadership beautiful in His righteousness, as opposed to the unholy leadership of Isaiah’s day.

The final statement of both parallel clauses says, “in the hand of the Lord” and “in the hand of God” respectively. The first word “hand,” *yad*, (יָד) can mean anything from the arm to the hand itself; while the second word “hand,” *caf*, (כַּף) specifically means the palm of the hand. Both words are preceded by the preposition *bet*, (בְּ) which can be translated “by” rather than “in.” God will be the one who will make what was once an unholy city into a place shining with His glory.

D. The New Name

We come now, in 62:4-5 to what might be the new name by which God will designate Jerusalem and Israel. Israel was once referred to as “forsaken” and “desolate.” But in the future she will be called, “My Delight is in Her” and “Espoused.”

Isaiah is having fun in this verse playing with Hebrew roots and words. He particularly plays with the word “delight.” But it is difficult to see the fun he has without looking at the Hebrew. We realize that many of the readers do not know Hebrew. But for those who do, it is printed below for our explanation of what Isaiah does. We will also make a comment about *why* we think he does what he does. Confused? We will try to help.

The Hebrew in question in 62:4 reads,

חפצי יקרא לך כי-בעולה ולארצך בה

כי-תבע וארצך בך יהוה חפצ

In reading this section, notice that Isaiah is having fun with the word “delight,” *khefetz* (חפצ). In the first verse, Isaiah says, “For you shall be called, ‘My delight is in her’”(62:4b). In the second line, the word *khefez* is used again, but this time it is separated by the word *bakh*, (בַּךְ) which makes a similar sound to *bah* (בה) in the first line. In addition, notice the last word in each line. They are different words, yet comprised of the same root letters. Again, to those who understand Hebrew the illustration involving the word *khefez* would have been poetically beautiful, especially if it were sung, as it probably was.

What is our point here? It is simply this: Isaiah is stressing how God will cause His people to take delight in both Him and in the precious Land that He gave them as their inheritance. It is one thing to state that it will be a delight to them

and that they will be, in return, an utter delight to Him. But singing it and stating it in beautiful — and delightful — Hebrew poetry as Isaiah does, adds greater emphasis to the point he was making.

The word “delight” is a very touching and endearing term. Isaiah did not just want to reach his listeners’ minds; he also wanted to touch their hearts. Hebrew poetry could definitely accomplish this, especially when such a literary master, like Isaiah, uses it. Imagine how Isaiah’s listeners, and especially those who were part of Israel’s trials in the centuries to follow, felt when they read from the Lord via Isaiah that someday, their beloved city would be called “God’s Delight.” Imagine even more so how they would have felt when they heard that not only would the city be called a delight, but also that they themselves would be considered as delightful to God as a bride is to her love-struck husband.

¹ J. H. Hertz. *Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, 883.

² C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 7, 434.

³ A. J. Rosenberg, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 2, p. 482.

⁴ Both definitions of these verbs are derived from BDB, 364 and 1053 respectively.

⁵ Victor Buksbazen, *The Prophet Isaiah*, vol. 2, 466.