

## Haftarat Tzav צו

**Torah: Leviticus 6:1–8:36**

**Haftarah: Jeremiah 7:21–8:3; 9:23–24**

### **Our Hope is in the Living God**

#### **General Overview**

This is not one of the happiest passages in the Bible. Jeremiah is in the midst of preaching a sermon pronouncing a severe judgement upon the house of Judah (and any of the house of Israel who have taken shelter among them). The main case that God seems to have against the people in this haftarah is their disobedience to the covenant. Although they were going through the form of offering sacrifices, in reality, they were not pleasing the Lord. The Holy One desired holy living from them. The worst form of their disobedience was their idol worship. Jeremiah describes how they offered their own children to be sacrificed right outside their doors, in the Hinnom Valley of southern Jerusalem.

After he described their crimes, Jeremiah pronounced the subsequent calamities into which the Lord would lead them for judgement. Among the disasters that would befall the Jerusalemites, would be sadness, weeping, death, and destruction.

Finally, after skipping almost all of chapters eight and nine, the haftarah concludes with one of the most famous passages of admonition and encouragement found anywhere in the prophets, Jeremiah 9:23–24 (in the English Bible). Here, Jeremiah reminds the sinful and needy people that man's wisdom, strength, and riches get him nowhere. Instead, the godly prophet exhorts us all to boast in the fact that we know and understand Him who is the source of all mercy and justice.

#### **Connection to the Parasha**

In *Parashat Tzav* we have various teachings designed to regulate the sacrificial system. Although there was never an explicit command to do so, it was always understood that the sacrifices were to be offered with sincerity. They were never there just so people could merely go through the motions of slaughtering animals for the sake of performing a ritual. They were always intended to function just as the Hebrew word for sacrifice suggests: to bring one near to God.

This haftarah condemns, among other things, insincerity in the worship of God. It blasts the act of bringing sacrifices just to offer them while the offerer has no intention to live a life according to God's covenant. "It proclaims the uselessness of worship when combined with un-holiness and unrighteousness."<sup>1</sup>

## Exposition

Jeremiah's writings always seem rather difficult to outline. After all, when he spoke these messages, he was not always using a sermon outline! Nevertheless, there is a logical flow of thought in this particular haftarah.

The prophet begins by giving a harsh and sarcastic condemnation of the people's actions. Then, he delivers to them the severe consequences they would have to face for such behaviour. Finally, the sages who designed this haftarah included a set of verses containing wonderful words of hope and consolation.

Accordingly, we will use the following outline: (Please note that there is a slight difference of verse enumeration between the Hebrew Bible and most English Bibles. We will follow the English versions. Thus, the final verses of this haftarah are 9:23–24.)

- I. Condemnation (7:21–31)
- II. Consequences (7:32–8:3)
- III. Consolation (9:23–24)

In this excerpt from Haftarat Tsav we will focus on part 3, the message of Consolation. The rabbis who formed this haftarah did not want to conclude on a sombre note. Like tender shepherds themselves, they wanted to give the people hope and encouragement. Hence, they decided to finish the haftarah by skipping over a section of Jeremiah, to 9:23–24 (in the English Bible), which read,

Thus says the Lord, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises loving-kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the Lord.

The people in Jeremiah's day were trusting in their own values and in their own abilities to succeed in life. This haftarah sufficiently demonstrated that they used all of their being to serve themselves instead of serving the living God. Their misplaced trust got them into deep and serious trouble and sin. The Holy One was teaching them a lesson in these final verses of the haftarah. It is a valuable lesson on righteousness and wisdom:

It was not the wiles of statecraft, strong battalions, or vast wealth that are the real and permanent foundation of a national life; as little as worldly wisdom, power, and riches are in themselves the guarantors of happiness or peace in the life of the individual.<sup>2</sup>

Instead of trusting in themselves, Jeremiah bids them to put their trust in the Lord. He alone is the giver of all of the qualities that make a rich and healthy life: "loving-kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth." Indeed, from God they will both receive mercy and learn how to show mercy.

Jeremiah used the word *hesed* (חסד) for “mercy.” This word stresses God’s covenantal faithfulness. God will always act according to His covenants toward those who enter into a covenant with Him. Just as their sin led to covenantal discipline, so would their repentance lead to abundant mercy.

In addition, the prophet speaks of justice. They did not show justice, especially to those who were the most vulnerable in their society — the widows and orphans. But God is a God of justice. If they were to turn to Him, they would receive fair and just justice. They would also learn how to practice this kind of justice to others.

Finally, their God always is a righteous God. He always acts righteously, that is, He always does things which are for the good of others, in perfect harmony with who He is and what His Word says about Him. The people of Jeremiah's day did not live righteously. They were sinners and needed a fundamental change in their lives in order for them to live out the righteousness of God. God Himself was imploring them to come to Him. We are told that He “delights” to give the gifts of mercy, justice, and righteousness.

The people were very boastful in the sin into which they were entangled. Their ways led to their destruction. The prophet tells us that there is only one thing that is “boast worthy” — that is to understand and know God. This knowledge is not a head knowledge, which tempts the flesh to boast in its intellectual ability. Rather, it is an intimate knowledge of someone that only comes as a result of a deep and abiding personal and covenantal relationship. That, says the Holy One is their only hope. Indeed, it is more than a hope, it is an assurance and a guarantee to receive untold blessing for eternity.

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<sup>1</sup> J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, 439.

<sup>2</sup> Hertz, *op. cit.*, 442.