

Haftarat D'varim דוֹרִים

Torah: Deuteronomy 1:1–3:22

Haftarah: Isaiah 1:1–27

God Will Be Known Through His Remnant

General Overview

This passage serves as Isaiah's own introduction to his prophecy. All of the major themes that he covers in his book are introduced for us in the first 27 verses of chapter one. In short, after the identification of the prophet in verse one, we read about the outcry of God against Israel and Judah's sin intermingled with more than one plea for repentance and the mention of the hope of future restoration of God's people to Himself.

Connection to the Parasha

This haftarah and its corresponding Torah portion, D'varim, are both traditionally read on the Shabbat that comes before *Tisha B'Av*, the ninth of the Hebrew month of *Av*, (late July to early August). This is the date on which, according to rabbinical tradition, both the First and the Second Temples were destroyed, (the First by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and the Second by the Romans in 70 CE). The haftarot that are read on the three Sabbaths before Tisha B'Av are called "Haftarot of Rebuke," of which Haftarat D'varim is the last. This haftarah, sometimes referred to as "Isaiah's Great Arraignment of Judah,"

has been selected in order to warn all generations in Israel of the moral and social transgressions that led to the downfall of the Jewish state.¹

Along the same vein, the prophecy of Isaiah is referred to in 1:1 as a "vision." This is the English rendering of the Hebrew word, *hazon* (חֲזוֹן). Accordingly, since this is the haftarah read on the Shabbat before Tisha B'Av, that particular Shabbat is called in Jewish liturgy "Shabbat Hazon," חֲזוֹן שַׁבַּת.

In the parasha, the children of Israel are getting ready to cross the Jordan and to begin the conquest of the Land. But they had waited 40 years for this moment, being delayed because of the sin of their forefathers in rejecting the Land. Now, this new generation was being spiritually prepared by the Holy One to inherit their Land. Isaiah comments on the sins in which their descendants would become entangled after they had settled in the Land. If the generation that conquered the Land would only have listened to the Lord in D'varim, then their children may not have become so covenantally unfaithful in Isaiah's day.

Exposition

As stated above, this passage functions as Isaiah's own introduction to his prophecy because it seems to introduce most of the major themes on which the prophet elaborates in the rest of the book. Our teaching outline, therefore, will reflect the contents in that light. This commentary will deviate a little from the

usual format in that, although we will proceed mostly verse-by-verse, there may also be the need to skip around throughout the passage, connecting similar thought patterns. Thus, we will look at Isaiah 1:1–27 and explore:

- I. The Nature of Judah's Rebellion
- II. The Judgement for Judah's Rebellion
- III. The Remnant from Judah's Rebellion
- IV. The Cure for Judah's Rebellion
- V. The Restoration from Judah's Rebellion

In this excerpt from Haftarat D'varim, we will focus on the third section, The Remnant from Judah's Rebellion.

III. The Remnant from Judah's Rebellion

In 1:8–9 Isaiah introduces to us the concept of “the remnant.” He says,

the daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a watchman's hut in a cucumber field, like a besieged city. Unless the Lord of hosts had left us a few survivors, we would be like Sodom, we would be like Gomorrah.

There are a few remarks that we need to make about these words. First, the phrase “daughter of Zion,” while usually referring to any of the suburbs that surround Jerusalem most likely is, in this instance, speaking specifically of Jerusalem, although understanding it as a suburb of Jerusalem would also fit the context. Grammatically, this phrase can be rendered as a genitive of apposition, hence, “daughter, Zion” instead of “daughter of Zion.”²

We read in verse 1:8 that Jerusalem is compared to a shelter in a vineyard and a watchman's hut in a cucumber field. The two images picture a besieged Jerusalem as an exposed island in the midst of a vulnerable sea of land. Isaiah presents the stark reality of this in chapters 36–39 where he records the story of the siege of Sennacherib during the reign of King Hezekiah. All of Judah was devoured and only Jerusalem — the remnant — was left. If it were not for the grace and intervention of God, Jerusalem would have been lost as well.

The concept of a remnant is developed even further in the next verse. Here we are told plainly that, “Unless the Lord of hosts had left us a few survivors, we would be like Sodom, we would be like Gomorrah” (1:9). Sodom and Gomorrah had no righteous remnant. God completely destroyed both cities. In the same way, He would have completely destroyed Jerusalem, if it were not for the remnant. The remnant itself owed its existence completely to God who, “of His own grace and mercy spared them and not for any righteousness of our own.”³

However, existence of a remnant did not mean that God would withhold His discipline for covenant unfaithfulness. This fact is clearly spelled out in 1:10 where Isaiah addresses the people of Judah as if they were Sodom and Gomorrah. Discipline did come to Judah as well as to Israel. It came severely. But

due to the existence of the remnant and God's own faithfulness to the covenant, the nation as a whole would never be completely destroyed. Later, Isaiah even spoke of a portion of Israel that would return to the Land from which they were driven in discipline.

As we have said, Isaiah develops this idea of a "remnant" as his book progresses. It soon becomes evident that this remnant is a righteous remnant, owing their existence solely to the grace of God. This remnant is correctly identified as the true believers from Israel. The concept is also expanded on in the Brit Hadasha, or Renewed Covenant. Even in Paul's day, God had a remnant of those from Israel who believed and were faithful to His Word. Accordingly, Shaul states, "In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to (God's) gracious choice" (Romans 11:5).

¹ J. H. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, 750.

² C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 7, 86.

³ Hertz, op. cit., 752.