

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION  
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

THE WEEKLY HAFTORA  
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Seven Haftarot of Comfort

a. Why specifically these prophecies

The Tur, Orach Chaim siman 428 teaches:

"From (parashat) Bereishit until the 17th of Tammuz the haftora follows the theme of the parasha; from then onwards (the theme of the haftora is) according to the date and the events (related to it): there are three (haftarot) of rebuke, then seven of comfort... the seven of comfort are 'Nachamu' for parashat Va'etchanan, 'Va-tomer Tzion' for parashat Ekev, 'Aniya so'eret' for Re'eh, 'Anokhi' for Shoftim, 'Roni akara' for Ki Tetze, 'kumi uri' for Ki Tavo, and 'sos asis' for Nitzavim...."

In other words, the haftarot for most shabbatot of the year were selected because of the similarity between them and the parashot which they accompany, while those read from the 17th of Tammuz until the end of the year were chosen on the basis of their connection with the events of that period: there are three haftarot of rebuke for the period between the 17th of Tammuz and Tish'a B'Av, followed by seven of comfort for the seven shabbatot after Tish'a B'Av – from parashat Va'etchanan until parashat Nitzavim. Thus there is no point in seeking any relation between these haftarot and the parashot which they accompany, since they were all chosen for their common theme: comfort.

But it is necessary for us to understand why, out of the many prophecies of comfort and redemption, it was specifically these that were chosen, as well as the reason for the specific order in which they are read. Our initial theory could be that the prophecies of comfort were selected from those of the 'prophet of comfort,' Yishayahu, and they were established one by one for each of these weeks. This theory could have been maintained had the order of the prophecies followed the order in which they appear in Sefer Yishayahu, i.e., that the prophecy that appears earliest in the Sefer would be selected for the first Shabbat, etc. But although this is the case for the most part, there are instances where this order is not

followed: the haftora for parashat Shoftim is from Yishayahu 51-52, while that of Re'eh – which is read prior to Shoftim – is from the second half of Chapter 54, while the first part of that chapter accompanies parashat Ki Tetze, which comes later.

#### b. Hierarchy and dialogue

The Ba'al Machzor Vitri discerns a deliberate hierarchy in the order of the haftarot. He writes:

"... And the latter ones, which all speak of comfort, are read from Tish'a B'Av until Yom Kippur, in the way that one comforts (a human mourner) slowly by stages, for someone who offers comfort too close to the time of tragedy is like one who predicts the future: "Tomorrow you will be king," which the bereaved cannot believe... therefore "Comfort you," "And Tzion shall say" – although Tzion is destroyed, do not say that she is abandoned. Since Hashem has "comforted" her already in His mercy, He does not call for mercy again. Up until this point the prophets comfort her; from here onwards He comforts her. And once she has received consolation, we follow with: "Sing, O barren one," "Arise and shine," "I shall rejoice."

The structure of the consolation is built on different levels, and it grows continually stronger.

A different explanation is offered by a Midrash quoted by the Avudraham in his comments on the order of the parashiot and haftarot:

"The Midrash suggests... that they (Chazal) established that the first of these haftarot would be "Comfort, comfort My people" – as though Hashem is commanding the prophets to comfort His nation. To this Knesset Yisrael responds: "And Tzion says, 'Hashem has abandoned me' – i.e., she is not consoled by the comfort of the prophets... And where the haftora is "a stormy afflicted one who will not be comforted," it is as if the prophets once again declare before the Holy One: See, Knesset Yisrael is not appeased with our consolations. Therefore the Holy One Himself again speaks: "I, I am your comforter," and then He says, "Rejoice, O barren one who has not given birth," and also "Arise and shine, for your light has come." To this, Knesset Yisrael responds: "I shall surely rejoice in Hashem" – as if to say, now I

have reason to rejoice and to be joyful, "My soul will rejoice in my God for He has dressed me in garments of salvation...."

c. Connection with exegesis?

Although, as mentioned, these haftarot were selected for their theme of consolation, there may still be some ideas common to each of them and to the parashot read on the same shabbatot.

The following ideas arise from an initial reading, and upon deeper examination no doubt more could be found.

Haftora of Va'etchanan – Nachamu (40:1-26)

A few pesukim in this prophecy speak of the unique Oneness of Hashem (for example, "To whom will you compare Me, that I will be compared, says the Holy One" (25) – see also pesukim 13, 17, 18), and this same idea is expressed in the famous pasuk from the parasha: "Shema Yisrael" – "Hear O Israel, Hashem our God – Hashem is One" (6:4).

In the Ten Commandments in the parasha we find the negative commands, "You shall have no other gods before Me;" "You shall not make for yourself any carved idol" (5:7-8), as well as other warnings: "Lest you become corrupt and make for yourselves a carved idol of any image" (4:16), "Guard yourselves lest you forget the covenant of Hashem your God... and make for yourselves an idol that is the likeness of anything" (4:23). In the haftora the prophet mocks "The idol – a craftsman casts it, and a refiner covers it with silver... he seeks a wise craftsman to make an idol that will not be moved" (19-20).

Haftora of Ekev – "Tzion says..." (49:14-51:3)

In the parasha we find a warning: "Guard yourselves lest your hearts be tempted... and Hashem's anger will burn against you, and He will stop up the heavens and there shall be no rain... and you will quickly die off from upon the good land" (11:16-17). In the haftora, the prophet announces in Hashem's name: "At My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a desert... I clothe the heavens in black garments..." (50:2). And in the concluding pasuk of the haftora, the prophet says: "For Hashem will comfort Tzion, He shall comfort all her desolate places, and He shall make her desert like Eden, and her Arava like Hashem's garden" (51:3). Eden, the garden of Hashem, is none other than the primordial Gan Eden, the place where

water flowed abundantly, irrigating the garden and all its vegetation. And thus all of Eretz Yisrael – including its most arid regions – fits its description in the parasha as "a good land, a land of streams of water, fountains and depths that flow from the valleys and the mountains" (8:7).

Haftora of Re'eh – "O stormy afflicted one" (54:11-55:5)

Firstly, the prophet speaks of children: "And all your children will know Hashem, and there will be great peace among your children" (54:13). In the parasha we already hear of Israel referred to as children: "You are children to Hashem your God" (14:1).

Secondly, the key to redemption – in the prophet's words – lies in acts of righteousness: "In righteousness shall you be established" (54:14). The parasha speaks at length about matters of righteousness. We are warned several times to remember the Levi, who has no portion and inheritance in the land, and to include him in the household (12:12, 12:18, 14:27, 14:29). Likewise we are told to give gifts to the poor, to the stranger and to the orphan and widow (14:29). There is also the obligation to cancel debts at the end of seven years (15:1-3), and later on there are pesukim that speak of the obligation to open one's hand to one's impoverished brother and to give him "sufficient for what he needs, that which he lacks" (15:8). We are also commanded as to what to give the Hebrew man- and maid-servants at the end of their period of indenture.

Thirdly, the parasha promises: "And you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow; you shall rule over many nations, but they shall not rule over you" (15:6). In the haftora we are told that if Israel will listen to Hashem, then "I shall make an everlasting covenant with you, the everlasting loving promises of David. Behold, I have made him a witness to the nations, a leader and commander of nations... and nations that did not know you will run towards you" (55:3-5).

Haftora of Shoftim – "I, I am your comforter" (51:12-52:12)

The parasha deals with the institutions of leadership of the nation: judges, officers, the king, kohanim, prophets. In the haftora, too, we hear about leadership: "There is no leader for her among all the children she has borne; there is none who holds her hand of all the children she has raised" (51:18). "Their rulers yell" (52:5), "the voice of your watchmen – they have lifted their voices" (52:8).

Haftora of Ki Tetze – "Sing, O barren one" (54:1)

The prophet announces, "More numerous are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman" (54:1). The prophet sees before him two women – one desolate and alone, the other married. The one who is married is loved by her husband, while the desolate one is hated and abandoned. Indeed, she is "like a woman abandoned and of downcast spirit," like "the woman of one's youth whom one has despised" (6). But Hashem promises that "with great mercy" and "with everlasting lovingkindness" He will return this "wife of His youth" to Him. The subject of a beloved wife and a despised wife is mentioned at the beginning of the parasha, and that of separating from the wife of one's youth and sending her away is dealt with further on (24:1-2).

Haftora of Ki Tavo – "Arise, shine" (chapter 60)

The visions contained in this prophecy of redemption can be summarized by a single pasuk from the parasha: "Hashem has mandated you today to be a special nation for Him... and to make you supreme over all the nations which He has made, in praise and in name and in honor." This is a promise that the nations will recognize Israel's supremacy, a recognition that will involve the many details listed in the haftora, from pasuk 3 to pasuk 16.

Haftora for Nitzavim – "I shall surely rejoice in Hashem" (61:10-63:9)

Firstly, in contrast to the curse in the parasha – a curse that will come upon the land if Israel violates the covenant – "brimstone and salt and burning in all the land; it shall not be sown, nor shall it bear produce, nor shall any grass grow in it" (29:22), at the time of the redemption a blessing will come upon the land: "and your land will no more be called 'desolate'..." (62:4).

Secondly, an important principle regarding redemption and repentance and the special connection between the Holy One and His nation arises from the text of this parasha and its interpretation. The Torah promises: if you will "return to Hashem your God and listen to His voice" (30:2), then "Hashem will BRING BACK your captivity and have mercy on you, and He will RETURN and gather you from all the nations where Hashem your God scattered you" (30:3). Rashi, quoting R. Shimon Bar Yohai in massekhet Megilla (29a) comments: "The text should have read, "He will RETURN your captivity." Our Sages learned from this that the

Shekhina remains with Israel, as it were, in the distress of their exile, and when they are redeemed He brings redemption to Himself, for He will return with them."

This principle is echoed in the closing pasuk of the haftora: "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them; in His love and His pity He redeemed them" (63:9). (The Ibn Ezra explains how the "keri u-ketiv" – the traditional reading of the pasuk which differs slightly from the written text – reflects how Hashem Himself, as it were, is afflicted, and therefore He hastens to deliver them.)

This covenant of love and identity of destiny, as it were, is what ensures the ultimate redemption, and it is a most worthy conclusion to the series of prophecies of consolation.