

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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32 Give ear, O heavens, let me speak;

Let the earth hear the words I utter!

²May my discourse come down as the rain,

My speech distill as the dew,

Like showers on young growth,

Like droplets on the grass.

³For the name of the LORD I proclaim;

Give glory to our God!

⁴The Rock!—His deeds are perfect,

Yea, all His ways are just;

A faithful God, never false,

True and upright is He.

לב* האזינו השמים ואדברה

ותשמע הארץ אמריי פי:

² יערף כמטר לקחי

תזל כטל אמרתי

כשעים עלי־דשא

וכרביבים עלי־עשב:

³ כי שם יהוה אקרא

הבו גדל לאלהינו:

⁴ הצור תמים פעלו

כי כל־דרכיו משפט

אל אמונה ואין עול

צדיק וישר הוא:

v. 1. בכתב היד שלנו, צורת השירה ב־37 שורות, ולפי הלכות כתיבת ספר תורה, היא נכתבת ב־70 שורות

Epilogue: Moses' Last Days (continued)

MOSES' POEM (32:1–43)

The poem describes the consequences of Israel's anticipated betrayal of God. Its style is typical of biblical poetry. Each verse consists of at least two lines that are parallel to each other in meaning.

1. Heaven and earth are employed as a literary device. They function here as objective on-lookers who serve as witnesses to the poem's charges and the fairness of Israel's punishment.

2. *distill* Parallel to "come down."

dew Hebrew: *tal*, which refers to rain or dew, both of which were thought to fall from the sky.

3. *the name of the LORD I proclaim* Proclaiming God's name means declaring His qualities, recounting His deeds.

Give glory Acknowledge God's greatness.

Usually God's "greatness" refers to His vast power. Here it seems to point to His extraordinary kindness and justice in dealing with Israel.

THE HISTORY OF GOD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAEL (vv. 4–18)

4. This verse states the first main theme of the poem: God has treated Israel with complete justice.

Rock Hebrew: *tzur*; as a term for God, it expresses the idea that the deity is a source of refuge, a protector.

perfect That is, reliable, faithful.

never false Never faithless.

True In the sense of faithful.

upright Trustworthy, reliable.

CHAPTER 32

This is the last *parashah* of the Torah that is read at services on *Shabbat* morning. (Chapters 33–34 are read only on *Simhat Torah*, to complete the annual cycle of Torah reading.) It consists entirely of a poem reprising and summarizing the themes of the first section of Deuteronomy: the greatness and generosity of

God and the stubbornness and unreliability of the Israelites.

1. *Give ear, O heavens . . . Let the earth hear* Listen to me—you spiritual people whose thoughts are in heaven, and also you down-to-earth people whose concerns are more material. This message is meant for all of you (Hatam Sofer).

⁵Children unworthy of Him—
That crooked, perverse generation—
Their baseness has played Him false.
⁶Do you thus requite the LORD,
O dull and witless people?
Is not He the Father who created you,
Fashioned you and made you endure!

⁷Remember the days of old,
Consider the years of ages past;
Ask your father, he will inform you,
Your elders, they will tell you:
⁸When the Most High gave nations their
homes
And set the divisions of man,
He fixed the boundaries of peoples
In relation to Israel's numbers.

5 שֶׁחַת לוֹ לֹא בָנָיו מוֹמִים
דֹּר עֲקֹשׁ וּפְתִלְתֵּל:
6 הֲיִלְיִהוּהָ * תִּגְמְלוּ-זֹאת
עִם נָבֵל וְלֹא חֲכָם
הֵלֹא-הוּא אָבִיךָ קִנְיָךְ
הוּא עֲשָׂךְ וַיִּכְנֶנְךָ:
שׁוּבִי 7 זְכוֹר יְמֹת עוֹלָם
בִּינֵנו שְׁנוֹת דֹּר-וְדוֹר
שָׁאֵל אָבִיךָ וַיִּגְדֶּךָ
זְקֵנֶיךָ וְלֹאמְרוּ לָךְ:
8 בְּהִנְחַל עֲלֵיוֹן גּוֹיִם
בְּהַפְרִידוֹ בֵּי אָדָם
יִצֵּב גְּבֻלֹת עַמִּים
לְמִסְפָּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

v. 6. ה' רבתי לפי נוסחים מקובלים

5. Children unworthy of Him This verse states the second main theme of the poem: Israel, in contrast to God, is faithless and perfidious, a “crooked, perverse generation.” The reference to the people Israel as God’s children is part of the parent–child metaphor through which the poem expresses God’s relationship with Israel. The translation of this verse is a paraphrase, because the text is difficult and of uncertain meaning.

6. The poem now addresses the Israelites directly, charging them with responding to God’s benefactions with ingratitude and rebellion.

Do you thus requite the LORD Literally, “Is it the LORD you requite thus?” The word order in Hebrew underscores the shocking nature of their behavior: “Do you treat even God this way?” In Torah scrolls, this interrogative prefix, the letter *hei* (Is it?), is written in larger script. The reason for this is unknown, but it has the effect of heightening the shock expressed by the question.

dull Hebrew: *naval*; literally, “villain(ous).” Here it refers to the foolish attitudes of the villain, who feels safe because he is contemptuous of God, believing that He is inattentive to human events or powerless to affect them. Israel acts as if it shared this attitude.

witless Unwise.

made you endure Literally, “brought you into existence.”

7. If the audience has any doubt about the truth of what is said, it can turn for confirmation to its elders—the custodians of historical tradition in a predominantly oral culture. Similar challenges to consult the elders appear in the Book of Job (8:8–10) and in a Mesopotamian royal inscription.

8. Most High Hebrew: *elyon*; used in the Bible as a common title of God, primarily in poetry, by both Israelites and non-Israelites. It also appears in non-Israelite sources outside the Bible. Here it emphasizes God’s supremacy over all beings considered divine; and because it does not have exclusively Israelite associations, it suits the context of God organizing the entire human race.

gave nations their homes According to Genesis, the division of humanity into nations took place after the Flood, in the aftermath of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 10, 11:1–9). God’s benefactions to Israel began by dividing the human race into separate nations and choosing Israel as His own.

In relation to Israel’s numbers A matter of how the world was to be ruled. In the Hebrew basis of the Septuagint, as well as in a Qumran

HALAKHAH L’MA·ASEH

32:7. Remember . . . Ask This verse echoes the command to remember our past and to ask our ancestors about it (Exod. 12:25–27). This commandment is carried out explicitly in the *Pesah Seider*; in the rituals associated with the other pilgrimage festivals; and in the education of our children in Jewish history, tradition, and observance.

⁹For the LORD's portion is His people,
Jacob His own allotment.

¹⁰He found him in a desert region,
In an empty howling waste.
He engirded him, watched over him,
Guarded him as the pupil of His eye.

¹¹Like an eagle who rouses his nestlings,
Gliding down to his young,
So did He spread His wings and take him,
Bear him along on His pinions;

¹²The LORD alone did guide him,
No alien god at His side.

¹³He set him atop the highlands,
To feast on the yield of the earth;
He fed him honey from the crag,
And oil from the flinty rock,

¹⁴Curd of kine and milk of flocks;

⁹ כִּי חֶלֶק יְהוָה עַמּוֹ
יַעֲקֹב חֶבֶל נַחֲלָתוֹ:

¹⁰ וּמָצְאוּהוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִדְבָּר
וּבְתַהוֹ יֵלֵל יִשְׁמֵן
יִסְבְּבֵנְהוּ יְבוֹנְנֵהוּ
יִצְרְנֵהוּ כְּאִישׁוֹן עֵינָיו:

¹¹ כְּנֶשֶׁר יַעִיר קֶנֶן
עַל-גּוֹזְלָיו יִרְחֹף
יִפְרֹשׁ כַּנְּפָיו יִקְחֵהוּ
יִשְׂאֵהוּ עַל-אַבְרָתוֹ:

¹² יְהוָה בִּדְדַד יִנְהַנּוּ
וְאֵין עִמּוֹ אֵל נֹכַר:

¹³ וַיִּרְכַּבְהוּ עַל-בְּמוֹתַי בְּמַתֵּי אֶרֶץ
וַיֹּאכֵל תְּנוּבַת שְׂדֵי
וַיִּנְקְהוּ דְבֶשׂ מִסְּלַע
וְשִׁמֵּן מִחֶלְמִישׁ צֹר:

¹⁴ חֲמֵאֹת בָּקָר וְחֵלֶב צֹאן

scroll and other texts, the phrase here (*l'mispar b'nei Yisra-el*) reads "equal to the number of divine beings" (*l'mispar b'nei el*). According to a concept found elsewhere in the Bible, God established two tiers in governance of the world: at the top, God, who reserved Israel for Himself, to govern personally; below Him, 70 angelic divine beings, to whom God allotted other peoples. The image is that of a ruler who governs the capital or heartland of the realm personally and assigns the provinces to subordinates.

9. His people Refers to Jacob, a synonym for Israel both as an individual and as a nation.

allotment As God's "allotment," Israel was cherished and protected by Him.

10. found him Israel was like a foundling or a desert wanderer, in danger of starvation and exposure. This metaphor shows how perilous Israel's situation had been and how indebted it should be to God for its survival.

desert region The Sinai, where the Israelites roamed before entering the Promised Land. Hebrew: *eretz midbar*, a wilderness partly marked by vegetation and sparse water sources.

howling waste A wasteland filled with the howling of winds and wild animals.

engirded God encircled Israel protectively.

Guarded him From snakes, scorpions, and marauders like the Amalekites.

as the pupil of His eye A graphic simile for an object of protective care, because it is guarded by a reflex action.

11. God led Israel safely through the desert, in the manner of an eagle training its young to fly and catching them on its back when they tire or fall.

12. The LORD alone No other deity helped Israel; hence for Israel to turn to other gods is baseless as well as ungrateful.

guide him Through the wilderness to the Promised Land.

13. atop the highlands The mountainous heartland of Israel.

fed Hebrew: *va-yenikeihu*; literally, "suckled." Implies that God nurtured Israel, which exerted virtually no effort. The most barren places yielded abundant food: In fissures and caves were found honeycombs; in rocky limestone soils, oil-producing olive trees.

14. Curd Hebrew: *hem-ah*, which includes butter, cream, and *leben*, a coagulated form of sour milk. The Land's rich pastures sustain cattle that produce dairy products and meat, and its soil yields wheat and wine.

With the best of lambs,
And rams of Bashan, and he-goats;
With the very finest wheat—
And foaming grape-blood was your drink.

15 So Jeshurun grew fat and kicked—
You grew fat and gross and coarse—
He forsook the God who made him
And spurned the Rock of his support.
16 They incensed Him with alien things,
Vexed Him with abominations.
17 They sacrificed to demons, no-gods,
Gods they had never known,
New ones, who came but lately,
Who stirred not your fathers' fears.

עִם־הַלֵּב כָּרִים
וְאֵילִים בְּנִיבְשָׁן וְעִתּוּדִים
עִם־הַלֵּב כְּלִיּוֹת חֹטֵה
וְדָם־עֵגֶב תִּשְׁתֶּה־חֶמֶר:
15 וַיִּשְׂמַן יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּבְעֹט
שִׁמְנֵת עֲבִית כְּשִׁית
וַיִּטֵּשׁ אֱלֹהֵי עֲשָׂהוּ
וַיִּנְבֵּל צוּר יִשְׁעָתוֹ:
16 וַיִּקְנְאוּהוּ בְּזָרִים
כִּתּוּעֵבֶת יִכְעִיסוּהוּ:
17 וַיִּזְבְּחוּ לִשְׂדִים לֹא אֱלֹהֵי
אֱלֹהִים לֹא יָדְעוּם
חֲדָשִׁים מִקְרֹב בָּאוּ
לֹא שְׁעָרוּם אֲבֹתֵיכֶם:

best of lambs Literally, “fat of lambs.” Fat is often used figuratively to refer to the best, as in the idiom “the fat of the land.”

Bashan The mountain range in northern Transjordan, which included the best pastureland in the region, with herds famed for their strength and size.

very finest wheat Literally, “fat of the kidneys of wheat.” Some commentators take “kidneys” to mean the kernel of the wheat; the full phrase would then mean “the finest grains of wheat.” Others hold that it is a poetic overstatement meaning “wheat with grains as thick as kidneys.”

grape-blood A poetic metaphor for wine.

15. Jeshurun Hebrew: *Y'shurun* (the Upright; from *yashar*, “upright”), which alludes to “Israel” (*Yisra-el*) and sounds something like it. Used ironically here, it underscores how Israel has failed to live up to its expected character.

kicked Like an unruly, rebellious animal. Not satisfied and docile from being fed, Israel rejected the One who fed it.

You grew fat and gross and coarse Here the poet addresses Israel directly.

Rock of his support The Rock who delivered Israel and protected it from danger.

16. incensed Him By worshipping other gods, Israel provoked the resentful rage that God warned about in the Decalogue.

alien things . . . abominations Alien gods and idols.

17. The verse does not argue that Israel worshiped nonexistent beings, mere statues, but that it worshiped beings that lack effective power and are unworthy of worship.

demons Hebrew: *shedim*; better: “spirits.” In Akkadian, a *shed* is a minor protective spirit.

no-gods Pseudo-gods, beings undeservedly called “gods.”

Gods they had never known Although the poem has just denied their divinity, it continues to use “*elohim*” for these beings. Probably the word here means “so-called gods.”

New ones Unlike the Lord, “the ancient God” (33:27), who has acted on behalf of Israel since its beginning, these beings have no record of achievement or reliability. In the ancient world, antiquity was a hallmark of authenticity, and these new beings lacked it.

stirred not your fathers' fears The Septuagint renders “whom your fathers did not know,” which is synonymous with the second line in the verse.

15. kicked . . . forsook . . . spurned The ultimate ingratitude. God will bless Israel with a measure of prosperity, and that prosperity will lead them to become arrogant and to neglect God. When individuals or nations be-

come wealthy, they are often tempted to celebrate their material wealth at the expense of their spiritual development, focusing on what they do well and abandoning what may be more challenging.

¹⁸You neglected the Rock that begot you,
Forgot the God who brought you forth.

18 צֹר יִלְדֶךָ תִּשְׁכַּח *
וּתְשַׁכַּח אֶל מְחַלְלֶךָ:

¹⁹The LORD saw and was vexed
And spurned His sons and His daughters.

19 וַיִּרְא יְהוָה וַיִּנְאֶץ רביעי
מִכַּעַס בָּנָיו וּבָנֹתָיו:

²⁰He said:

I will hide My countenance from them,
And see how they fare in the end.

20 וַיֹּאמֶר אֶסְתִּירָה פָּנַי מֵהֶם
אֶרְאֶה מָה אַחֲרֵיהֶם

For they are a treacherous breed,
Children with no loyalty in them.

כִּי דֹר תִּהְפַּכְתָּ הָמָּה
בָּנִים לֹא־אֱמֵן בָּם:

²¹They incensed Me with no-gods,
Vexed Me with their futilities;

21 הֵם קִנְאוּנִי בְלֹא־אֱלֹהִים
כַּעֲסוּנִי בְהַבְלִיָּהֶם

I'll incense them with a no-folk,
Vex them with a nation of fools.

וְאֲנִי אֶקְנִיָּאִם בְּלֹא־עַם
בְּגוֹי נָבָל אֶכְעִיסֵם:

²²For a fire has flared in My wrath
And burned to the bottom of Sheol,
Has consumed the earth and its increase,

22 כִּי־אֵשׁ קָדְחָה בְּאֲפִי
וַתִּיקַד עַד־שְׂאוֹל תַּחֲתִית
וַתֹּאכַל אֶרֶץ וַיִּבְלָהּ

v. 18. י' זעירא לפי נוסחים מקובלים

18. Again the poem turns directly to Israel and exclaims that it is guilty of the most unnatural behavior: forgetting one's own parent.

begot . . . brought forth These Hebrew verbs may have been chosen to suggest a mother. The image of forgetting one's mother casts Israel's behavior in the most unnatural light.

GOD DECIDES TO PUNISH ISRAEL (vv. 19–25)

19. sons and . . . daughters The involvement of both men and women in the worship of foreign gods is also mentioned in 17:2 and 29:17.

20. See 31:17–18.

And see how they fare in the end Literally, “and see what their end will be.” God's words are ironic inasmuch as He intends to determine the outcome Himself.

treacherous breed Literally, “turnabout generation.” It broke faith with God.

21. God will punish the Israelites measure for measure, treating them as they treated Him. As the Israelites incensed Him by favoring

non-gods, He will incense them by favoring a non-people, sending it to invade them.

futilities Hebrew: *havalim*, one of the Bible's negative terms for idols; it means “puffs of breath,” “vapor.” In other words, insubstantial beings that do not last.

nation of fools “Nation of dullards, villains” (*goy naval*). Israel is characterized similarly (*am naval*) in verse 6. The description of the enemy as a no-folk and a nation of fools is reminiscent of Mesopotamian characterizations of nomadic, “uncivilized” outlanders as “not classed among people, not reckoned as part of the [civilized] land.”

22. For a fire has flared in My wrath / And burned to the bottom of Sheol Sheol is the netherworld. The use of the past tense implies that once God has decided on the punishment, it is as good as accomplished. Fire is a metaphor for God's anger (4:24), and burning to the bottom of Sheol and to the foundations of the mountains is a picturesque description of its power.

its increase The earth's yield, its produce.

20. See Comment to Deut. 31:17. Where the earlier verse says that God will hide the divine countenance from Israel, which will cause terrible things to happen to them, this passage softens the threat. God will hide from them “to

see how they fare in the end.” This leaves the possibility of our reclaiming God's attention—bringing God back into a godless world—by our behavior.

Eaten down to the base of the hills.

²³I will sweep misfortunes on them,

Use up My arrows on them:

²⁴Wasting famine, ravaging plague,

Deadly pestilence, and fanged beasts

Will I let loose against them,

With venomous creepers in dust.

²⁵The sword shall deal death without,

As shall the terror within,

To youth and maiden alike,

The suckling as well as the aged.

²⁶I might have reduced them to naught,

Made their memory cease among men,

²⁷But for fear of the taunts of the foe,

Their enemies who might misjudge

And say, "Our own hand has prevailed;

None of this was wrought by the LORD!"

²⁸For they are a folk void of sense,

Lacking in all discernment.

²⁹Were they wise, they would think upon this,

Gain insight into their future:

³⁰"How could one have routed a thousand,

Or two put ten thousand to flight,

וּתְלַהֵט מוֹסְדֵי הָרִים:

²³ אֶסְפֶּה עָלֵימוֹ רָעוֹת

חֲצֵי אֶכְלֶה־בָּם:

²⁴ מְזִי רָעַב וּלְחָמֵי רֶשֶׁף

וְקֶטֶב מְרִירֵי

וְשֶׁן־בְּהֵמוֹת אֲשַׁלַּח־בָּם

עִם־חַמַּת זֹחֲלֵי עָפָר:

²⁵ מִחוּץ תִּשְׁפֹּל־חֶרֶב

וּמִחֻדְרֵים אֵימָה

גַּם־בַּחוּר גַּם־בְּתוּלָה

יִוָּנֵק עִם־אִישׁ שִׁיבָה:

²⁶ אֶמְרָתִי אֶפְאַיֶהֶם

אֲשַׁבִּיתָהּ מֵאֲנוּשׁ זְכָרָם:

²⁷ לֹוּלֵי כָעַס אוֹיֵב אָגוּר

פֶּן־יִנְפְרוּ צָרֵימוֹ

פֶּן־יִאֲמְרוּ יִדְנּוּ לָמָּה

וְלֹא יִהְיֶה פֶּעַל כָּל־זֹאת:

²⁸ בִּי־גוֹי אֲבַד עֲצוֹת הַמָּה

וְאֵין בָּהֶם תְּבוּנָה:

²⁹ לֹו חֲכָמוֹ יִשְׁפִּילוּ זֹאת

חמישי

יְבִינוּ לְאַחֲרֵיתָם:

³⁰ אֵיכָּה יִרְדֹּף אֶחָד אֶלֶף

וּשְׁנַיִם יִנְיִסוּ רַבָּה

23. I will sweep . . . on them God resolves to bring all of His destructive forces against Israel.

Use up My arrows That is, shoot all My arrows, a metaphor for the calamities of verse 24. It is used again in verse 42.

24. Wasting famine Famine that will waste their bodies.

pestilence In some Arabic dialects, "ketev" refers to smallpox.

fanged beasts . . . venomous creepers Wild animals, such as lions, bears, and poisonous snakes. Settled territory was often in danger of being overrun by wild animals.

25. War will spread everywhere, and to people of both sexes (not just the young men who are the warriors) and of all ages.

As shall the terror within Those taking refuge indoors will die of fright.

GOD DECIDES TO LIMIT RETRIBUTION

(vv. 26–42)

26. reduced them to naught Obliterated them.

Made their memory cease Made an end to their name, wiped them out entirely.

27. taunts Hebrew: *ka-as*; literally, "vexation." The enemy would also vex God by falsely claiming credit for the defeat of Israel.

Our own hand has prevailed After its victory, this nation of dullards will reason exactly as Moses warns Israel not to reason when it prospers (8:17).

28. they The enemy.

29. Gain insight into their future Better: "reflect on what happened to them," on the circumstances or cause behind their victory.

30. The motif of a few chasing thousands is

Unless their Rock had sold them,
The LORD had given them up?"

³¹For their rock is not like our Rock,
In our enemies' own estimation.

³²Ah! The vine for them is from Sodom,
From the vineyards of Gomorrah;
The grapes for them are poison,
A bitter growth their clusters.

³³Their wine is the venom of asps,
The pitiless poison of vipers.

³⁴Lo, I have it all put away,
Sealed up in My storehouses,

³⁵To be My vengeance and recompense,
At the time that their foot falters.
Yea, their day of disaster is near,
And destiny rushes upon them.

³⁶For the LORD will vindicate His people
And take revenge for His servants,

אִם-לֹא כִּי-צוּרֵם מְכָרָם
יִהְיֶה הַסְּגִירָם:

³¹כִּי לֹא כְצוּרֵנוּ צוּרֵם
וְאֵיבֵינוּ פְּלִילִים:

³²כִּי-מִגֶּפֶן סוּדִם גִּפְנֵם
וּמִשְׂדֵּמֶת עֲמֹרָה

עֲנִבְמוּ עֲנִבֵי-רוֹשׁ
אֲשֶׁפֶלֶת מְרֵרֶת לָמוֹ:

³³חֶמֶת תִּנְיָנִים יִינֵם
וְרֹאשׁ פְּתָנִים אֲכֹרֹ:

³⁴הֲלֹא-הוּא כְּמֵס עֲמֹדֵי
חֶתֶם בְּאוֹצְרוֹתַי:

³⁵לִי נָקָם וְשָׁלֵם
לְעֵת תִּמּוּט רַגְלָם

כִּי קָרוֹב יוֹם אִיָּדָם
וְחָשׁ עֲתֵדֶת לָמוֹ:

³⁶כִּי-יִדְּיִן יְהוָה עִמּוֹ
וְעַל-עֲבָדָיו יִתְנַחֵם

a traditional way of describing a divinely determined rout.

sold them . . . given them up Handed them over, delivered them. Mere abandonment would not have produced a rout of such proportions; God must have actively aided the enemy.

31. their rock Here, used ironically of the enemy's god, as if the text said, "their so-called rock" (see v. 4). Nor could the enemy—if at all wise—credit its victory to its own gods, because its gods are not equal to Israel's God.

In our enemies' own estimation This translation is unlikely. It is implausible that the enemy, having just routed Israel, would consider its own gods unequal to Israel's God. Better: "nor are our enemies' guardians (*p'lilim*) [like our Rock]."

GOD DECIDES TO PUNISH THE ENEMY
(vv. 32–35)

32. The enemy will suffer the destiny of Sodom and Gomorrah: They will drink the same wine—from the same vines—that was served to the people of those devastated cities. Poisonous

drink is a metaphor for a disastrous fate.

33. pitiless poison Painful or incurable poison.

34. The poison wine is stored up securely, waiting for the day when God will serve it to the enemy. Describing the wine as "sealed up" is based on the practice of sealing the latches to storerooms with clay, stamped with the signet of the king or the official in charge, to detect whether the room has been entered without authorization.

35. To be My vengeance Hebrew: *li nakam*; literally, "vengeance is Mine." As the accompanying word "recompense" makes clear, "vengeance" refers only to just retribution, not to revenge.

At the time that their foot falters A biblical idiom for reversal of fortune.

destiny Hebrew: *atidot*; literally, "what is prepared." Probably refers to the punishment sealed up in God's storehouses (v. 34).

GOD'S PLAN TO DELIVER ISRAEL (vv. 36–42)

36. vindicate Judge in favor of.

take revenge for That is, avenge them, get satisfaction for the way the enemy treated them.

31. their rock is not like our Rock The God of Israel is like a rock, unfailingly supportive

and reliable. The gods of the pagan nations are like rocks, incapable of feeling or responding.

When He sees that their might is gone,
And neither bond nor free is left.

³⁷He will say: Where are their gods,
The rock in whom they sought refuge,
³⁸Who ate the fat of their offerings
And drank their libation wine?

Let them rise up to your help,
And let them be a shield unto you!

³⁹See, then, that I, I am He;
There is no god beside Me.

I deal death and give life;
I wounded and I will heal:
None can deliver from My hand.

⁴⁰Lo, I raise My hand to heaven
And say: As I live forever,

⁴¹When I whet My flashing blade
And My hand lays hold on judgment,

כִּי יִרְאֶה בִּי־אֲזַלְתַּי יָד
וְאָפֶס עֲצוּר וְעֹזוּב:

³⁷וְאָמַר אֵי אֱלֹהֵימוֹ
צוּר חֲסִיו בּוֹ:

³⁸אֲשֶׁר חָלַב זִבְחֵימוֹ יֹאכְלוּ
יִשְׁתּוּ יַיִן נְסִיכֶם

יִקְוֵמוּ וַיַּעֲזְרְכֶם
יְהִי עֲלֵיכֶם סִתְרָה:

³⁹רְאוּ | עֵתָהּ כִּי אֲנִי אֲנִי הוּא
וְאֵין אֱלֹהִים עִמָּדִי

אֲנִי אֲמִית וְאֶחֱיָה
מִחֲצַתִּי וְאֲנִי אֲרַפָּא

וְאֵין מִיָּדִי מַצִּיל:

שִׁי ⁴⁰כִּי־אֲשֶׁא אֶל־שָׁמַיִם יָדִי

וְאֲמַרְתִּי חַי אֲנֹכִי לְעֹלָם:

⁴¹אִם־שְׁנוֹתַי בְּרֶקַח חֲרָבִי

וְתֹאחֲזוּ בְּמִשְׁפָּט יָדִי

When . . . their might is gone When they have become totally powerless, so that they could not possibly attribute their salvation to themselves, God will intervene to save them.

neither bond nor free The meaning of this idiom is uncertain. Other biblical contexts (1 Kings 14:10, 21:21; 2 Kings 9:8, 14:26) suggest that the Hebrew *atzur v'azuv* may refer to “ruler and helper.” The verse would then mean that God will act when He, or Israel, sees that Israel is without a ruler or a helper to deliver it.

37. When Israel reaches the point of total helplessness, God will point out how the false gods in whom it trusted are powerless—in contrast to His own power (v. 39).

rock Used ironically, because Israel’s false gods will have proven unable to shield it from the enemy (see v. 31).

38. Who The false gods who were the objects of Israel’s illicit cult. The poem—if it is not being merely sarcastic—can represent these beings as actually eating and drinking the offerings because it does not deny their existence, it denies only their divinity.

39. Israel’s punishment by the Lord, and the inability of its false gods to protect it, should finally make it realize that the Lord alone is the only effective divine being, the only true God. He

brought all this about, and He alone can change it.

I, I am He That is, “I alone am He,” I alone control events.

There is no god beside Me Literally, “There is no god with me.” No god has been involved in the events.

I deal death and give life; I wounded and I will heal The first clause is a general assertion, meaning that God alone determines people’s welfare. The second means that it is He who is doing so in this particular case.

None can deliver from My hand None of your false gods could protect you from My punishment, and none will be able to save the enemy from Me.

40. I raise My hand to heaven Raising the hand heavenward is a gesture that accompanies invoking God in an oath. Here, with God as the speaker, it is simply an idiom meaning “I swear.”

As I live forever In human oaths, declaring “As the LORD lives” (*hai Adonai*) is a verbal counterpart to raising the hand heavenward. God swears by saying *hai anokhi* (or *ani*), using the pronoun “I” instead of His own name.

41. whet My flashing blade God is pictured as a warrior preparing for battle.

judgment Hebrew: *mishpat*. In light of the parallel term “blade” (literally, “sword”) and the

Vengeance will I wreak on My foes,
Will I deal to those who reject Me.
42I will make My arrows drunk with blood—
As My sword devours flesh—
Blood of the slain and the captive
From the long-haired enemy chiefs.

43O nations, acclaim His people!
For He'll avenge the blood of His servants,
Wreak vengeance on His foes,
And cleanse the land of His people.

44Moses came, together with Hosea son of Nun,
and recited all the words of this poem in the
hearing of the people.

45And when Moses finished reciting all these
words to all Israel, 46he said to them: Take to

אָשִׁיב נֶקֶם לְצַרִּי
וְלִמְשַׁנְּאֵי אֲשֵׁלֵם :
42 אֲשַׁכֵּיר חֲצֵלִי מִדָּם
וְחֶרְבִי תֹאכַל בָּשָׂר
מִדָּם חָלָל וְשִׁבְיָה
מֵרֹאשׁ פְּרָעוֹת אוֹיֵב :
43 הֲרִנְנוּ גוֹיִם עִמּוֹ
כִּי דָם-עֲבָדָיו יִקְוֶם
וְנֶקֶם יִשִׁיב לְצַרִּיו
וְכִפֵּר אֶדְמָתוֹ עִמּוֹ : פ

44 וַיָּבֵא 44 מֹשֶׁה וְיוֹדָבֵר אֶת-כָּל-הַדְּבָרִי
הַשִּׁירָה-הַזֹּאת בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם הוּא וְהוֹשִׁיעַ
בֶּן-נֹון :
45 וַיְכַל מֹשֶׁה לְדַבֵּר אֶת-כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים
הָאֵלֶּה אֶל-כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל : 46 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם

parallelism “arrows . . . sword” in the next verse, *mishpat* here must mean a weapon of judgment, an instrument of punishment.

My foes The enemy, although used by God as an agent for punishing Israel, is His foe. The Bible implicitly assumes that God uses evil nations to punish Israel and that they, too, will ultimately be punished.

wreak . . . deal Literally, “return . . . pay back.” The enemy’s punishment will be deserved.

42. The enemy will go down to a bloody defeat. The image of the devouring sword is a common one; that of drinking arrows is unique.

blood of the . . . captive The blood of wounded captives or prisoners killed after capture.

long-haired . . . chiefs This difficult passage has been explained as implying that warriors, like Samson, let their hair grow long, either out of a belief that strength resides there or as a mark of dedication to the deity (see Num. 6:1–21).

CELEBRATING ISRAEL’S DELIVERANCE (v. 43)

The poem concludes with a final invocation

calling on the nations to acclaim God’s deliverance of Israel and punishment of the enemy. This invitation implies that God’s salvation of Israel has importance for the world at large.

43. acclaim Congratulate Israel on its deliverance and for having such a God.

He’ll avenge the blood of His servants The verb “redeem” is used when the avenger is a relative; “avenge,” when it is God or human authorities. Hence the use of “avenge” here may be because in this part of the poem the Israelites are no longer described as God’s children but as His “servants” (v. 36).

cleanse the land of His people That is, cleanse His people’s land. Presumably, the land has been polluted by Israelite blood shed by Israel’s enemy, and God will cleanse it with the blood of the enemy (see Num. 35:33). But the Hebrew *admat* (land) may be a scribal error for *ud’ma-ot*, a variant (known from ancient Ugaritic) of *d’ma-ot* (tears). Thus the clause may mean that God “will wipe away His people’s tears.”

CONCLUSION TO THE POEM (vv. 44–52)

44. This verse summarizes the contents of 31:22 and 30. It means, “So Moses came—either from the place where he received the instructions to teach the poem, or from where he wrote

it—and taught it to the people.”

Hosea That is, Joshua (see Num. 13:16).

45. all these words The entire Teaching, including the poem.

heart all the words with which I have warned you this day. Enjoin them upon your children, that they may observe faithfully all the terms of this Teaching. ⁴⁷For this is not a trifling thing for you: it is your very life; through it you shall long endure on the land that you are to possess upon crossing the Jordan.

⁴⁸That very day the LORD spoke to Moses: ⁴⁹Ascend these heights of Abarim to Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab facing Jericho, and view the land of Canaan, which I am giving the Israelites as their holding. ⁵⁰You shall die on the mountain that you are about to ascend, and shall be gathered to your kin, as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his kin; ⁵¹for you both broke faith with Me among the Israelite people, at the waters of Meribath-kadesh in the wilderness of Zin, by failing to uphold My sanctity among the

שִׁימוּ לִבְבְּכֶם לְכָל-הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי
מֵעִיד בְּכֶם הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר תִּצְוֶם אֶת-בְּנֵיכֶם
לִשְׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת-כָּל-דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה
הַזֹּאת: ⁴⁷כִּי לֹא-דָבָר רֶק הוּא מִכֶּם
כִּי-הוּא חַיֵּיכֶם וּבְדָבָר הַזֶּה תִּתְּרִיבוּ יָמִים
עַל-הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אֲתֶם עֹבְרִים אֶת-
הַיַּרְדֵּן שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ: פ

מִפְטִיר ⁴⁸וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בַּעֲצֵם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
לֵאמֹר: ⁴⁹עֲלֵה אֶל-הָר הָעֵבְרִים הַזֶּה
הַר-נֶבֹו אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי
יַרְחוֹ וְרֵאֵה אֶת-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אָנִי נֹתֵן
לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאִחְזָה: ⁵⁰וּמָת בָּהָר אֲשֶׁר
אֲתָה עֹלֶה שָׁמָּה וְהֶאֱסַף אֶל-עַמִּיךָ
כְּאֲשֶׁר-יָמַת אַהֲרֹן אַחִיךָ בְּהָר הַהָר וַיֶּאֱסַף
אֶל-עַמּוּיוֹ: ⁵¹עַל אֲשֶׁר מְעַלְתֶּם בִּי בְּתוֹךְ
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִי-מְרִיבַת קָדֵשׁ מִדְּבַר-צֹן
עַל אֲשֶׁר לֹא-קִדַּשְׁתֶּם אוֹתִי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי

46. all the words with which I have warned you Better: “with which I have charged you.” It is clear from the rest of the verse that the words in question include commands, and because the poem contains none, the words must be those of the Teaching as a whole.

47. trifling The teaching is not frivolous or inconsequential, for Israel’s survival as a nation depends on it.

GOD SUMMONS MOSES TO HIS DEATH (vv. 48–52)

Moses has transmitted the poem to the people. Preparations for his departure resume.

48. That very day The day on which Moses concluded the activities just described. The only specific date previously mentioned in the book is the first day of the 11th month in the 40th year after the Exodus (1:3). On that date, Moses began to expound the Teaching (1:5); he did not necessarily finish it then. The context implies that God said this to Moses on the day he died, or perhaps the preceding day.

49. heights of Abarim Probably the moun-

tain range east of the Dead Sea. Mount Nebo was one of its prominent peaks. To reach it, Moses would have doubled back on the Israelites’ route the distance of one day’s march because, according to Num. 33:47–48, “the hills of Abarim, before [the city] Nebo,” was the Israelites’ last encampment before reaching their current one.

facing Jericho That is, east of Jericho, across the Jordan.

view the land This is a minor concession to Moses’ plea in 3:25, “Let me, I pray, cross over and see the good land.”

50. die . . . be gathered to your kin It was common belief in the ancient world that one’s spirit reunited after death with the spirits of one’s kin in Sheol, the netherworld.

as . . . Aaron died Six months earlier. See Num. 20:23–28, 33:38.

on Mount Hor Deuteronomy 10:6 gives a different place for Aaron’s death.

51. for you both broke faith with Me See Num. 20:1–13.

Meribath-kadesh The place at Kadesh where the incident in question occurred was

47. this is not a trifling thing for you Literally, “it is not an empty thing from you.” If anything in the Torah seems “empty” (i.e.,

unclear, meaningless), that perception is “from you,” owing to your own failure to study it thoroughly (JT Pe-ah 1:1).

Israelite people. ⁵²You may view the land from a distance, but you shall not enter it—the land that I am giving to the Israelite people.

יִשְׂרָאֵל: ⁵²כִּי מִמֵּנֶה תִּרְאֶה אֶת־הָאָרֶץ
וְשָׁמָּה לֹא תָבוֹא אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־אֲנִי
נֹתֵן לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: פ

called Meribah, “Quarrel Place,” commemorating the quarrel that touched it off (see Num. 20:13).

wilderness of Zin This is the section of the

wilderness of Paran (i.e., of the Negeb and the Sinai) that formed the southern boundary of the Promised Land.

הַפְּטָרָה לְשַׁבַּת שׁוּבָה

HAFTARAH FOR SHABBAT SHUVAH

HOSEA 14:2–10; MICAH 7:18–20 (*Ashk'nazim*—with *Va-yeilekh*)

HOSEA 14:2–10; JOEL 2:15–27 (*Ashk'nazim*—with *Ha-azinu*)

HOSEA 14:2–10; MICAH 7:18–20 (*S'fardim*)

(Shabbat T'shuvah [*the Sabbath of Repentance*] is the Shabbat before Yom Kippur, also called Shabbat Shuvah after the first word of this haftarah. This occasion coincides with the reading of either Va-yeilekh or Ha-azinu. Among Ashk'nazim, some congregations recite the passages from Hosea and Joel every year; others recite all three passages.)

In this *haftarah*, the core passage from Hosea focuses on a great call for human repentance, supplemented by the promise of divine healing and sustenance for those who have returned to God. The added selection from Joel introduces rituals of penitence and another promise of divine restoration; the added selection from Micah celebrates God's attributes of mercy and forgiveness of sin.

Combinations of nonconsecutive passages occur several times in the annual *haftarah* cycle. However, such "skipping" (as the Sages call it) from unit to unit is permitted only within the same prophetic book or within a single scroll. In the case of this *haftarah*, all selections are taken from within a single unit, the anthology of 12 prophetic books called "The Twelve" (*Trei Asar*).

Hosea's opening call for repentance dominates the *haftarah*. His appeals to "return to" (*shuvah* . . . *ad* and *shuvu el*) God (vv. 2–3) exhort the people to turn from their sin and rebellion. His call is also the hinge on which a human–divine dynamic turns, as shown by plays on the operative verb. In the sequel, God declares that, after the people take the initiative to repent, He "will heal their backsliding [*m'shuvatam*]" and take them back in love—for His "anger has turned [*shav*]" from them (v. 5). The result of such divine favor will be a period of national restoration and renewal. Not only will Israel be healed but "They

who sit [*yosh'vei*] in his [i.e., Israel's] shade will be revived [*yashuvu*]" as well (v. 8). God's blessing to the people will sustain all who come in contact with them.

Turning and transformation thus constitute the basic structure of the first part of the *haftarah*, embracing the people's turning from sin to God, and God's turning from wrath to loving care.

After Hosea's instruction in repentance, Joel's liturgical instructions articulate a deeper ritual structure: a shofar blast to assemble the nation for fasting and purification, and the priests' supplication to God on behalf of His people. Meanwhile, the liturgical proclamation of divine forgiveness in Micah 7:18–20 supplements Hosea in a different way. Here God's assertion of loving care is climaxed by a human declaration that God's forgiveness is incomparable.

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

Shabbat Shuvah concludes an 11-week cycle of special Sabbaths that began after the fast of the 17th of *Tammuz*. For this period, *haftarah* texts were chosen according to the theme of the day and not because of any verbal correspondence with the weekly Torah portion. Prophetic readings for *Shabbat Shuvah* highlight the themes of human repentance and divine mercy. Hosea, in particular, expresses confession of sins and commitment to God; Joel refers to rituals of contrition and purification, along with priestly prayers; and Micah celebrates divine forgiveness of sin.

The *haftarah* readings emphasize the activity of repentance—the external acts (verbal and behavioral) that announce and activate a transformation of religious life. The inward journey "to-

ward” God is left for the individual worshiper, along with the “words” that must be taken to heart and spoken with integrity. According to a later master, this journey is a return to one’s spiritual source, to a transcendent point of integration symbolized on earth by *Shabbat*.

14 ²Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God,
For you have fallen because of your sin.

³Take words with you
And return to the LORD.

Say to Him:

“Forgive all guilt

And accept what is good;
Instead of bulls we will pay
[The offering of] our lips.

⁴Assyria shall not save us,
No more will we ride on steeds;

Nor ever again will we call

Our handiwork our god,
Since in You alone orphans find pity!”

⁵I will heal their affliction,
Generously will I take them back in love;

For My anger has turned away from them.

⁶I will be to Israel like dew;
He shall blossom like the lily,

יָד שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ ²

כִּי כָשַׁלְתָּ בְּעוֹנֶךָ :

קָחֵוּ עִמָּכֶם דְּבָרִים ³

וְשׁוּבוּ אֶל־יְהוָה

אָמְרוּ אֵלָיו

כָּל־תְּשׂא עוֹן

וְקַח־טוֹב

וְנִשְׁלַמְהָ פְּרִים

שְׁפָתֵינוּ :

אֲשׁוּר | לֹא יוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ ⁴

עַל־סוֹס לֹא נִרְכָּב

וְלֹא־נֹאמַר עוֹד

אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְמַעֲשֵׂה יָדֵינוּ

אֲשֶׁר־בָּךְ יִרְחַם יְתוּם :

אֲרַפָּא מְשׁוּבָתֶם ⁵

אֲהַבֶּם נְדָבָה

כִּי שָׁב אַפִּי מִמֶּנּוּ :

אֶהְיֶה כְּטֵל לְיִשְׂרָאֵל ⁶

יִפְרַח כְּשׁוֹשַׁנָּה

Hosea 14:2–4. The prophet Hosea calls on the nation to repent. Elements of this act include the recognition of guilt and its rejection (vv. 2,4); repentance (v. 2); confession of sin and appeal to mercy (v. 3); and the rejection of past practices, with the decision never again to engage in them (vv. 4,9). This fourfold structure anticipates the teachings on repentance formulated in the Middle Ages by Saadia (*Doctrines and Beliefs*) and by Maimonides (MT Repentance 2:2,4).

References to repentance in the Torah differ from those in the prophets. In the Torah, repentance is something that the people may do after divine punishment has occurred, something that may lead to God’s merciful cancellation of the “distress” (see Deut. 4:29–31, 30:1–10). Characteristically, however, the prophets’ call for repentance precedes any punishment, because it is an

act that may avert the divine decree. This is its use in most traditional Jewish sources.

The prophet instructs the people in the use of appropriate words of confession (Ibn Ezra, Radak), appealing to them that they ask God to “Forgive all guilt” (*kol tissa avon*). This phrase alludes to the divine attribute of mercy (see *nosei avon* [forgiving iniquity] in Exod. 34:7 and elsewhere).

And accept what is good Hebrew: *v’kah tov*. The meaning is obscure, perhaps a request that God accept the good deeds done (Kara), the good heart (Radak), or even words of contrition (Ibn Ezra).

Instead of bulls we shall pay / [The offering of] our lips The Hebrew is obscure. Based on the Septuagint reading “fruit” in the singular, many modern scholars read the word *parim*

He shall strike root like a Lebanon tree.
 7His boughs shall spread out far,
 His beauty shall be like the olive tree's,
 His fragrance like that of Lebanon.
 8They who sit in his shade shall be revived:
 They shall bring to life new grain,
 They shall blossom like the vine;
 His scent shall be like the wine of Lebanon.
 9Ephraim [shall say]:
 “What more have I to do with idols?
 When I respond and look to Him,
 I become like a verdant cypress.”
 Your fruit is provided by Me.
 10He who is wise will consider these words,
 He who is prudent will take note of them.
 For the paths of the LORD are smooth;
 The righteous can walk on them,
 While sinners stumble on them.

וַיִּךְ שָׁרְשָׁיו כְּלִבְנֹן:
 7 יִלְכוּ יִנְקוּתָיו
 וַיְהִי כְבוֹד הַדּוֹד
 וְרִיחַ לוֹ כְּלִבְנֹן:
 8 יִשְׁבוּ יִשְׁבֵי בְצֵלוֹ
 יַחֲיוּ דָגָן
 וַיִּפְרְחוּ כַגֶּפֶן
 זָכְרוּ כִּיִּין לְבָנוֹן: 8
 9 אֶפְרַיִם
 מִה־לִּי עוֹד לְעַצְבִּים
 אֲנִי עֲנִיתִי וְאֲשׁוּרְנוּ
 אֲנִי כְּבָרוֹשׁ רַעֲוֹן
 מִמְּנֵי פְרִיָה נִמְצָא:
 10 מִי חָכֵם וַיִּבֶן אֱלֹהִים
 נָבוֹן וַיִּדְעֵם
 כִּי־יִשְׁרִים דְּרָכֵי יְהוָה
 וַצַּדִּיקִים יִלְכוּ בָּם
 וּפְשָׁעִים יִכָּשְׁלוּ בָּם:

2 ¹⁵Blow a horn in Zion,

Solemnize a fast,
 Proclaim an assembly!
 16Gather the people,
 Bid the congregation purify themselves.
 Bring together the old,
 Gather the babes
 And the sucklings at the breast;

ב ¹⁵ תִּקְעוּ שׁוֹפָר בְּצִיּוֹן
 קִדְשׁוּ-צוֹם
 קְרְאוּ עֲצָרָה:
 16 אִסְפוּ-עָם
 קִדְשׁוּ קְהָל'
 קַבְּצוּ זְקֵנִים
 אִסְפוּ עוֹלָלִים
 וַיִּנְקֵי שָׂדִים

(bulls) as *p'ri* (fruit of) + *m*, understanding the *m* as a poetic embellishment. This yields: “We shall pay the fruit of our lips [i.e., confess].” Thus prayer substitutes for a sacrificial offering, and confession is an offering of contrition.

9. A fitting conclusion to the prophet's call, affirming the main point: Spiritual fidelity leads to a thorough transformation of Ephraim's earthly life.

10. consider . . . take note A concluding exhortation.

these words . . . of them If “these” refers to the preceding counsel to repent (Rashi), then v.

10a is the rhetorical conclusion to verses 2–9. Alternatively, if “these” refers to the “paths of the LORD” in the following phrase (Ibn Ezra), then the reference is to the justice of God (“path,” or “way,” indicates divine providence; cf. Exod. 33:13). By contrast, Radak understood “these” to mean the prophet's earlier words of reproof. In this view, the exhortation calls on the people to take heed of God's judgment.

Joel 2:15–16. Blow a horn This proclamation of alarm invokes a national assembly. Technical terms are used to stress the significance of the ingathering. The call for “the bridegroom [to]

Let the bridegroom come out of his chamber,
The bride from her canopied couch.

¹⁷Between the portico and the altar,
Let the priests, the LORD's ministers, weep
And say:

“Oh, spare Your people, LORD!
Let not Your possession become a mockery,
To be taunted by nations!
Let not the peoples say,
‘Where is their God?’”

¹⁸Then the LORD was roused

On behalf of His land
And had compassion
Upon His people.

¹⁹In response to His people
The LORD declared:

“I will grant you the new grain,
The new wine, and the new oil,
And you shall have them in abundance.
Nevermore will I let you be
A mockery among the nations.

²⁰I will drive the northerner far from you,
I will thrust it into a parched and desolate
land—

Its van to the Eastern Sea
And its rear to the Western Sea;
And the stench of it shall go up,
And the foul smell rise.”

For [the LORD] shall work great deeds.

יֵצֵא חֲתָן מִחַדְרוֹ
וְכִלָּה מִחֻפָּתָהּ׃
¹⁷ בֵּין הָאוֹלָם וְלַמִּזְבֵּחַ
יִבְכוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים מִשְׁרָתֵי יְהוָה
וַיֹּאמְרוּ
חֹסֶה יְהוָה עַל-עַמּוֹךָ
וְאֵל-תִּתֵּן נַחֲלָתְךָ לַחֲרָפָה
לְמַשְׁלַבֵּם גּוֹיִם
לִמָּוֶה יֹאמְרוּ בְעַמִּים
אֵיחָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם׃

¹⁸ וַיִּקְנָא יְהוָה

לְאַרְצוֹ

וַיַּחֲמֵל

עַל-עַמּוֹ׃

¹⁹ וַיַּעַן יְהוָה

וַיֹּאמֶר לְעַמּוֹ

הַנְּנִי שִׁלַּח לְכֶם אֶת-הַדֶּגֶן

וְהַתִּירוֹשׁ וְהַיִּצְהָר

וּשְׁבַעְתֶּם אֹתוֹ

וְלֹא-אֶתֶן אֶתְכֶם עוֹד

חֲרָפָה בְּגוֹיִם׃

²⁰ וְאֶת-הַצְּפוֹנִי אֲרַחֵק מֵעֲלֵיכֶם

וְהַדְּחִיתִיו אֶל-אֲרָץ צִיָּה וּשְׁמָמָה

אֶת-פָּנָיו אֶל-הַיָּם הַקְּדָמָי

וְסָפוּ אֶל-הַיָּם הָאֲחֵרוֹן

וְעָלָה בְּאִשׁוֹ

וְתַעַל צַחֲנָתוֹ

בִּי הַגְּדִיל לַעֲשׂוֹת׃

come out of his chamber” provides a dramatic counterpoint to those terms, heightening the sense of communal obligation over all personal pleasure. By law, bridegrooms were exempted from military service and other public obligations (see Deut. 20:7, 24:5).

17. Between the portico and the altar The portico was an entrance area, or vestibule, in front of the Temple. The outer altar was at the other end of the courtyard. This area was used for public prayer.

And say This threefold supplication begins with an appeal to “spare” (*husab*) the nation (see Jon. 4:10–11). Then it asks God to prevent the people from being taunted. It climaxes with an example of mockery (“Where is their God?”), saving for last the appeal’s theological dimension, with its suggestion of God’s lack of power.

18. Then the LORD was roused As if in direct response to the supplication of verse 17.

20. northerner Many interpreters understand this as a reference to the “enormous horde”

21 Fear not, O soil, rejoice and be glad;
For the LORD has wrought great deeds.
22 Fear not, O beasts of the field,
For the pastures in the wilderness
Are clothed with grass.
The trees have borne their fruit;
Fig tree and vine
Have yielded their strength.
23 O children of Zion, be glad,
Rejoice in the LORD your God.
For He has given you the early rain in [His]
kindness,
Now He makes the rain fall [as] formerly—
The early rain and the late—
24 And threshing floors shall be piled with
grain,
And vats shall overflow with new wine and
oil.
25 “I will repay you for the years
Consumed by swarms and hoppers,
By grubs and locusts,
The great army I let loose against you.
26 And you shall eat your fill
And praise the name of the LORD your God
Who dealt so wondrously with you—
My people shall be shamed no more.
27 And you shall know
That I am in the midst of Israel:
That I the LORD am your God
And there is no other.
And My people shall be shamed no more.”

21 אֶל־תִּירָאִי אֲדָמָה גִּילִי וּשְׂמַחִי
כִּי־הִגְדִּיל יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת׃
22 אֶל־תִּירָאוּ בַּהֲמוֹת שָׂדֵי
כִּי דָשְׂאוּ נְאוֹת מִדְּבַר
כִּי־עָץ נִשָּׂא פְרִיֹו
תֵּאֲנֶה וְגַפֵּן
נָתַנוּ חֵילִם׃
23 וּבְנֵי צִיּוֹן גִּילוּ
וּשְׂמַחוּ בִיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
כִּי־נָתַן לָכֶם אֶת־הַמּוֹרָה לְצִדְקָה
וַיּוֹרֵד לָכֶם גֶּשֶׁם
מּוֹרָה וּמִלְקוֹשׁ בְּרֵאשׁוֹן׃
24 וּמָלְאוּ הַגְּרָנוֹת בָּר
וְהִשְׁקוּ הַיְקָבִים תִּירוֹשׁ וַיִּצְהָר׃
25 וּשְׂלַמְתִּי לָכֶם אֶת־הַשָּׁנִים
אֲשֶׁר אָכַל הָאֲרֵבָה הַיִּלְק
וְהַחֲסִיל וְהַגּוֹזִם
חֵילִי הַגְּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַחְתִּי בְכֶם׃
26 וְאָכַלְתֶּם אֱכוֹל וּשְׂבֹעַ
וְהִלַּלְתֶּם אֶת־שֵׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה עִמָּכֶם לְהַפְּלִיא
וְלֹא־יִבְשׂוּ עַמִּי לְעוֹלָם׃
27 וַיִּדְעֹתֶם
כִּי בִקְרֵב יִשְׂרָאֵל אָנִי
וְאָנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
וְאִין עוֹד
וְלֹא־יִבְשׂוּ עַמִּי לְעוֹלָם׃ ס

prophesied in Joel 2:2, whose devastation is now reversed. Some commentators interpret this as a metaphor for the locust (Rashi, Ibn Ezra).

23. The beneficence of rain will cause the earth, the animals, and the people to rejoice (vv. 21–23).

[as] *formerly* Better: “[both] at the beginning [of the rainy season],” following Ibn Ezra

and the Masoretic notes. Early rabbinic tradition understood this as doubled rainfall—not a poetic hyperbole but rather a miracle (BT Taan. 5a).

27. *I am in the midst of Israel* The concluding oracle of assurance announces God’s self-manifestation among the people. God’s indwelling presence is revealed through the bounty of the Land.

7 ¹⁸Who is a God like You,
 Forgiving iniquity
 And remitting transgression;
 Who has not maintained His wrath forever
 Against the remnant of His own people,
 Because He loves graciousness!
¹⁹He will take us back in love;
 He will cover up our iniquities,
 You will hurl all our sins
 Into the depths of the sea.
²⁰You will keep faith with Jacob,
 Loyalty to Abraham,
 As You promised on oath to our fathers
 In days gone by.

ז ¹⁸ מִי־אֵל כְּמוֹךָ
 נִשָּׂא עוֹן
 וְעִבֵּר עַל־פְּשָׁע
 לְשֹׁאֲרֵי־תוֹ
 לֹא־הֶחֱזִיק לְעַד אָפוּ
 כִּי־חָפֵץ חַסֵּד הוּא :
¹⁹ יָשׁוּב יִרְחַמֵּנוּ
 יִכְבֹּשׁ עֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ
 וְתִשְׁלִיךְ בְּמַצְלוֹת יָם
 כֹּל־חַטָּאוֹתֵם* :
²⁰ תִּתֵּן אֱמֶת לְיַעֲקֹב
 חַסֵּד לְאַבְרָהָם
 אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאַבְתָּינוּ
 מִימֵי קֶדֶם :

19. v. מלא ר

Micah 7:18–19. Customarily these verses are also recited during the *Tashlikh* ceremony on the afternoon of the first day of *Rosh ha-Shanah*.

On that occasion, the community enacts the reference to God casting sins into the sea and asserts faith in divine forgiveness.