

# הַפְּטָרָה לַשַּׁבָּת הַגָּדוֹל

## HAFTARAH FOR SHABBAT HA-GADOL

MALACHI 3:4–24

This *haftarah* contains God's promise to the people in the period after the rebuilding of the Temple in 516–15 B.C.E. The prophet announces that sacrificial offerings will again be favorably received by God, as in ancient times. First, however, God will contend with the nation's breach of moral and ritual law and bring sinners to judgment. Hope lies in repentance and in observance of the Torah. God's call to the people through Malachi, the healing mission of Elijah, and the teaching of Moses all show God's continual concern for reconciliation and human welfare.

Restoration is the recurrent theme of this *haftarah*: the restoration of acceptable offerings in the Temple (3:4), the repair of the Covenant through repentance (v. 7), the renewal of trust in divine justice (v. 18), and the reconciliation of parents and children (v. 24). Most of these statements include variations of the verb *shuv* (turn, return). Presumably, a crisis of trust in God's just providence has perverted the people's soul, leading to callous indifference in the moral and cultic realms. The *haftarah* is thus pervaded by a deep sense of estrangement from the right order of things, whether in the family, in society, or in the divine-human relationship.

In a rebuke that precedes the *haftarah*, the people are quoted as saying that "All who do evil are good in the sight of the LORD." Indeed, they mockingly jibe, "Where is the God of justice [*mishpat*]?" (Mal. 2:17). In response, God comes to redress the cause of *mishpat* (judgment) in verse 3:5, in which the literal "bring to judgment" is understood as "to contend against you." God will also attend to the sense of the God-fearers that "It is useless to serve God" (v. 14). Actions have consequences. If the people repent and serve God fully, they will receive the riches of heavenly blessing. Otherwise, they will be blasted to ash—root and branch. So deep is the people's resistance that God finally announces He will send His prophet

Elijah to renew their hearts. This unilateral act is proof of God's love of Jacob (announced at the beginning of the collected prophecies of Malachi).

This is Malachi's message of hope. The framers of the biblical canon, placing Malachi as the last of the prophets, believed it to be a final prophetic word to those for whom Scripture teaches divine truth.

### RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

The phrase *shabbat ha-gadol* (the great Sabbath) is a fixed formulation of rabbinic liturgy, found in the Grace after Meals in the special supplication for *Shabbat* (beginning *r'tzei*). In that context, it emphasizes the special holiness of each *Shabbat*. The term also traditionally designates the *Shabbat* before *Pesah*. Its meaning in this setting is uncertain, which has elicited much speculation.

One likely explanation for the choice of Mal. 3:4–24 as the *haftarah* for *Shabbat ha-Gadol* is the old tradition that the future redemption will occur on *Pesah*, the prototype of redemption (BT RH 11a). Because the *haftarah* could be construed to herald God's great day, it is to be proclaimed in hope and in warning before the festival itself. The term *shabbat ha-gadol* would then simply be a shorthand designation for saying that on this *Shabbat* the *haftarah* proclaiming the final "great" (*gadol*) day is read. This is very much like the formulation *Shabbat Shuvah*, which is one way to designate the *Shabbat* before *Yom Kippur*, when the theme of repentance (*t'shuvah*) is stressed through a *haftarah* selection beginning with the word *shuvah* (repent; Hos. 14:2).

The *haftarah*'s focus on the tithe obligations would have reinforced the rabbinic selection. Indeed, according to the Mishnah, "on Passover

(the people) are judged with respect to (their) produce” (MRH I:2). Because the law required tithes from agricultural produce gathered before *Pesah*, recitation of the *haftarah* on the *Shabbat* before the festival would duly warn the people to fulfill their obligations to God and to the poor, and thus merit divine favor in the ensuing year. Our custom of charitable giving (*ma-ot hittim*) at this time, ini-

tiated so that the needy would have grain for *matzah*, continues the relationship between philanthropy and piety at the *Pesah* season. The *haftarah* thus signals that gifts have a divine dimension. From this perspective, *Shabbat ha-Gadol* calls attention to an ultimate or “great” accountability that all creatures bear for the resources of the earth and the sacred task of their redistribution.

**3**<sup>4</sup>Surely the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of yore and in the years of old. <sup>5</sup>But [first] I will step forward to contend against you, and I will act as a relentless accuser against those who have no fear of Me: Who practice sorcery, who commit adultery, who swear falsely, who cheat laborers of their hire, and who subvert [the cause of] the widow, orphan, and stranger, said the LORD of Hosts.

<sup>6</sup>For I am the LORD—I have not changed; and you are the children of Jacob—you have not ceased to be. <sup>7</sup>From the very days of your fathers you have turned away from My laws and have not observed them. Turn back to Me, and I will turn back to you—said the LORD of Hosts. But you ask, “How shall we turn back?” <sup>8</sup>Ought man to defraud God? Yet you are defrauding Me. And you ask, “How have we been defrauding You?” In tithe and contribution. <sup>9</sup>You are suffering under a curse, yet you go on defrauding Me—the whole nation of you. <sup>10</sup>Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, and let there be food in My House, and thus put Me to the test—said the LORD of Hosts. I will surely open the floodgates of the sky for you and pour down blessings on you; <sup>11</sup>and I will banish the locusts from you, so that they will not destroy the yield

**ג** <sup>4</sup>וְעִרְבָה לַיהוָה מִנְחַת יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם כִּימֵי עוֹלָם וּכְשָׁנִים קְדָמֵינוּ: <sup>5</sup>וְקָרַבְתִּי אֵלֵיכֶם לְמִשְׁפָּט וְהִיִּיתִי אֶדְרָמָהָר בְּמִכְשָׁפִים וּבִמְנַאֲפִים וּבְנִשְׁבָּעִים לְשָׁקֵר וּבְעִשְׂקֵי שְׂכָר־שְׂכִיר אֶלְמָנָה וַיִּתְּוֹם וּמִטִּי־גֵר\* וְלֹא יִרְאוּנִי אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת:

<sup>6</sup>כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה לֹא שָׁנִיתִי וְאַתֶּם בְּגִי־יַעֲקֹב לֹא כִלִיתֶם: <sup>7</sup>לְמִימֵי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם סָרְתֶם מִחֻקִּי וְלֹא שָׁמַרְתֶּם שׁוּבוּ אֵלַי וְאִשׁוּבָה אֵלֵיכֶם אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת וְאַמַּרְתֶּם בְּמָה נִשְׁוֹב: <sup>8</sup>הֲיִקְבַּע אָדָם אֱלֹהִים כִּי אַתֶּם קֹבְעִים אֹתִי וְאַמַּרְתֶּם בְּמָה קֹבְעֵנוּךְ הַמַּעֲשֵׂר וְהַתְּרוּמָה: <sup>9</sup>בְּמֵאֲרָה אַתֶּם נֹאֲרִים וְאַתִּי אַתֶּם קֹבְעִים הַגּוֹי כָּלוּ: <sup>10</sup>הֲבִיאוּ אֶת־כָּל־הַמַּעֲשֵׂר אֶל־בֵּית הָאוֹצָר וַיְהִי טֶרֶף בְּבֵיתִי וּבְחֲנוּנֵי נֹא בְּזֹאת אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אִם־לֹא אֶפְתַּח לָכֶם אֶת אַרְבּוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהִרִיקְתִּי לָכֶם בְּרֻכָה עַד־בְּלִי־דֵי: <sup>11</sup>וְגַעַרְתִּי לָכֶם בְּאֹכֵל וְלֹא־יִשְׁחַת לָכֶם אֶת־פְּרֵי הָאָדָמָה וְלֹא־

v. 5. י' במקום ה'

**Malachi 3:5. Who practice sorcery** Condemnation of witches and false oaths and of the abuse of widows, orphans, and strangers finds echoes in Exod. 22:17,19–21.

**7. Turn back to Me, and I will turn back to you** Malachi’s exhortation assumes the people’s ability to respond to God’s initiative.

of your soil; and your vines in the field shall no longer miscarry—said the LORD of Hosts. <sup>12</sup>And all the nations shall account you happy, for you shall be the most desired of lands—said the LORD of Hosts.

<sup>13</sup>You have spoken hard words against Me—said the LORD. But you ask, “What have we been saying among ourselves against You?” <sup>14</sup>You have said, “It is useless to serve God. What have we gained by keeping His charge and walking in abject awe of the LORD of Hosts? <sup>15</sup>And so, we account the arrogant happy: they have indeed done evil and endured; they have indeed dared God and escaped.” <sup>16</sup>In this vein have those who revere the LORD been talking to one another. The LORD has heard and noted it, and a scroll of remembrance has been written at His behest concerning those who revere the LORD and esteem His name. <sup>17</sup>And on the day that I am preparing, said the LORD of Hosts, they shall be My treasured possession; I will be tender toward them as a man is tender toward a son who ministers to him. <sup>18</sup>And you shall come to see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between him who has served God and him who has not served Him.

<sup>19</sup>For lo! That day is at hand, burning like an oven. All the arrogant and all the doers of evil shall be straw, and the day that is coming—said the LORD of Hosts—shall burn them to ashes and leave of them neither stock nor boughs.

**16. those who revere the LORD** Hebrew: *yir-ei YHVH*. Used as a technical designation for those who revere God’s name (3:20), in contradistinction to those who despise it (1:6). They shall be vindicated on the day of judgment (3:20–21). Presumably, this refers to a group of particularly pious people.

**19. the day that is coming** References to the future “day” of judgment punctuate the prophet’s speech (3:2, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23). A complex scenario is envisaged, dominated by the advent of an angelic messenger, the admonition of sins, the in-

תִּשְׁבַּל לְכֶם הַגֶּפֶן בַּשָּׂדֶה אָמַר יְהוָה  
צְבָאוֹת: <sup>12</sup> וְאַשְׁרוּ אֶתְכֶם כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם כִּי־  
תִהְיוּ אִתָּם אֶרֶץ חֹפֵץ אָמַר יְהוָה  
צְבָאוֹת: ס

<sup>13</sup> חִזְקוּ עָלַי דְּבַרְיֵכֶם אָמַר יְהוָה וְאַמְרֵתֶם  
מִה־נִּדְבַרְנוּ עָלֶיךָ: <sup>14</sup> אֲמַרְתֶּם שׁוֹא עֶבֶד  
אֱלֹהִים וּמִה־בָּצַע כִּי שָׁמְרָנוּ מִשְׁמֵרְתּוֹ  
וְכִי הִלְכְנוּ קְדֻרָנִית מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת:  
<sup>15</sup> וְעַתָּה אֲנַחְנוּ מֵאֲשֵׁרִים זָדִים גַּם־נִבְנֹנוּ  
עֲשֵׂי רָשָׁעָה גַם בָּחֲנוּ אֱלֹהִים וַיִּמָּלְטוּ:  
<sup>16</sup> אִזּוּ נִדְבַרוּ יִרְאֵי יְהוָה אִישׁ אִישׁ אֶל־  
רֵעֵהוּ וַיִּקְשַׁב יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמַע וַיִּכְתַּב סֵפֶר  
זָכְרוֹן לְפָנָיו לִירְאֵי יְהוָה וּלְחֹשְׁבֵי שְׁמוֹ:  
<sup>17</sup> וְהָיוּ לִי אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת לַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר  
אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה סִגְלָה וְחַמְלָתִי עֲלֵיהֶם  
כַּאֲשֶׁר יַחְמַל אִישׁ עַל־בְּנוֹ הָעֶבֶד אֲתוֹ:  
<sup>18</sup> וְשַׁבְתֶּם וּרְאִיתֶם בֵּין צְדִיק לְרָשָׁע בֵּין  
עֶבֶד אֱלֹהִים לְאִשֶׁר לֹא עֲבָדוֹ: ס

<sup>19</sup> כִּי־הִנֵּה הַיּוֹם בָּא בְּעַר בְּתַנּוּר וְהָיוּ  
כָּל־זָדִים וְכָל־עֹשֵׂה רָשָׁעָה קָשׁ וְלֹהֵט  
אִתָּם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הִבָּא אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת  
אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יֵעֻזַב לָהֶם שְׂרֵשׁ וְעַנָּף: <sup>20</sup> וְזָרְחָה

terventions of Elijah, the fiery purgation of sinners, the vindication of the pious, and the visible distinction between the righteous and evildoers. This scenario was variously explicated and ordered by medieval Jewish commentators, in light of other biblical and Rabbinic evidence. In turn, the images were understood in either literal or figurative terms. The prophet Malachi was himself the heir to a long tradition of this rhetoric, produced in a period of more than 300 years and in various patterns.

<sup>20</sup>But for you who revere My name a sun of victory shall rise to bring healing. You shall go forth and stamp like stall-fed calves, <sup>21</sup>and you shall trample the wicked to a pulp, for they shall be dust beneath your feet on the day that I am preparing—said the LORD of Hosts.

<sup>22</sup>Be mindful of the Teaching of My servant Moses, whom I charged at Horeb with laws and rules for all Israel.

<sup>23</sup>Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the coming of the awesome, fearful day of the LORD. <sup>24</sup>He shall reconcile parents with children and children with their parents, so that, when I come, I do not strike the whole land with utter destruction.

Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the coming of the awesome, fearful day of the LORD.

**24. He shall reconcile parents with children**  
The language is difficult. The act of reconciliation here is literally “restore the heart” (*heshiv lev*). Different meanings of the preposition translated “with” (*al*), however, make it an open question whether the prophet envisions the reconciliation

לְכֶם יֵרָאֵי שְׁמִי שֶׁמֶשׁ צְדָקָה וּמִרְפָּא  
בְּכִנְפֵיהֶּ וַיִּצְאֲתֶם וּפְשָׁתֶם בְּעִגְלֵי מִרְבֵּק:  
וְעִסוֹתֶם רְשָׁעִים כִּי־יִהְיוּ אֶפְרַת תַּחַת  
<sup>21</sup>כַּפּוֹת רַגְלֵיכֶם בַּיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה אִמָּר  
יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת: פ

<sup>22</sup>זְכְרוּ תוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה עַבְדִּי אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי  
אוֹתוֹ בְּחֹרֵב עַל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל חֻקִּים  
וּמִשְׁפָּטִים:

<sup>23</sup>הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי שֹׁלַח לְכֶם אֶת אֱלִיָּה הַנָּבִיא  
לִפְנֵי בּוֹא יוֹם יְהוָה הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא:  
<sup>24</sup>וְהֵשִׁיב לֵב־אֲבוֹת עַל־בָּנִים וְלֵב בָּנִים  
עַל־אֲבוֹתָם פֶּן־אֲבֹא וְהִפִּיתִי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ  
חֶרֶם:

[הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי שֹׁלַח לְכֶם אֶת אֱלִיָּה הַנָּבִיא  
לִפְנֵי בּוֹא יוֹם יְהוָה הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא: \*]

end. במסורת הקריאה נשנה הפסוק לפני האחרון

of parents “with” their children or “along with” them. In the first case, divine wrath will be forestalled by intergenerational reconciliation; in the other, both generations together will return to God.