

## Lesson Plan: Isaiah 49 verses 14-19, Haftara for Parashat Ekev<sup>1</sup>

### Goals:

1. The students will appreciate Nevu'a as a response to political/social realities AND will realize the enduring value of the Nevu'a, recognizing that the message remains relevant even when the political/social situation changes.
2. The students will recognize that the book of Ezra (known in English as Ezra and Nehemiah) is a source of historical information about the beginning of the second Temple period.
3. The student will develop skills in interpreting metaphors and understanding their rhetorical contribution to a prophecy
4. The student will recognize that the two central problems addressed in this prophecy (viz., lack of support from Jews outside Israel and active opposition from established political forces) are endemic to any attempt at establishing a Jewish political presence in the Land of Israel. The student will reflect on the solutions the prophet promises for these problems.
5. The student will reflect on the value of these attempts, despite the difficulties.

### Frontal Teaching: Challenges faced by the immigrants at the time of the "Return to Zion" (the initial return to the Land of Israel after the Babylonian Exile).

Begin by reminding students of 40:9-11. Use slide 2 to review v. 11 and ask students "who are the sheep in this metaphor"? Students should remember that Jews are being returned to the Land by God, after the exile.

Then ask: Some Jews do indeed return. Pretend you are one of those. What great EXPECTATIONS do you have about the land of Israel once you arrive? List their expectations on the board. Most will deal with normal concerns like homes, jobs, schools, but try to elicit from the student expectations of support from two key groups: a. more Jews from Babylonia will join and move to Israel; b. the Persian government will continue to support the Return. When students bring up concerns like "missing my friends at home,"<sup>2</sup> use this as an entrée to the expectation that just as your family joined the return, so will others. When students bring up concerns like "will my dad have a job," bring up the issue of Persian imperial support for the return and the question of whether this will return.

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<sup>1</sup> The haftara begins 49:14 and continues until 51:3.

<sup>2</sup> Full disclosure: I am writing this lesson plan 12 days after making aliya with my wife and 2 kids.

Then use slide 3 to illustrate the two problems that the returning Jews encounter, problems that prevent the fulfillment of these expectations.

- a. Many Jews remained in Babylonia and did not join the Return. Jerusalem remains a city of many buildings and few people. (The archaeology demonstrates this, but for teaching purposes, it is easier to demonstrate this by reference to Nehemiah 11, in which a communal “goral” is established to settle 10% of the returnees in Jerusalem.) Note that with a weaker class, it is not worth teaching the verse from Nehemiah.
- b. The Persian Government did not remain supportive. These verses provide detail on this issue: Ezra 4:4-5. The verses describe how the “am ha-arets” – those who had remained in the Land of Israel, Jewish or non-Jewish -- opposed the Returnees, and interceded with the Persian government to stop the government’s support for the project. I think it important that students understand the idea of “the opponents of the returnees” since this will come up in the passage from Isaiah. Students will inevitably ask “Were the opponents Jewish themselves?” The Am-Ha-Aretz described here may well have had Jewish ancestors, but they are a distinct community from the returnees. Are they Jews? That is one of the main issues in Sefer Ezra, and so I suggest giving a simple but honest answer in class: “Some were and some weren’t.”

Then, ask students how these problems influence their expectations. Slide 4 illustrates the idea of shattered expectations. –

### **Frontal Teaching: Identifying the Argument in Isaiah 49:14-16.**

Then, ask students what happened to the promises of chapter 40? This leads directly to the expression that God has abandoned Israel, as expressed in the opening verse of the haftara-see slide 5. Carefully read the verse and have students identify the two expressions that the Land of Israel says about God. (Students should realize that in this chapter, the prophet is addressing the Land of Israel [Tzion], not the Jewish people as in Chapter 40.)

Ask students what type of feeling can mitigate the sense of abandonment? Elicit from the students the idea that overwhelming love makes it impossible to feel abandonment. Ask students what is the prime example of unconditional overwhelming love – students should speak about maternal love. Then teach verse 15 using slide 6, as follows:

- a. Teach the first part of the verse, highlighting the “mappik he” possessive endings, and then the he ha she’ela rhetorical question.
- b. Ask what answer they’d give to the rhetorical question (presumably most students will answer “no.”)
- c. Explore the answer that Yeshaya gives to the question (emphasizing where the word “but” must be inserted in the translation), and explain how the answer emphasizes both the transcendent nature of God and His love for the Land of Israel.

Then present v. 16, using slide 7, and ask students how v. 16 goes beyond v. 15 in demonstrating that God has not abandoned Jerusalem, and that He actually will solve Jerusalem's problems? The first half of the verse speaks about God's consistent attention (see Rashi on the image of 'writing on hands' – לראותך ולזכור אותך תמיד). In examining the first half of the verse, Students should recognize that the verse speaks about one of Jerusalem's concrete problems – the city's walls.

Then have students outline the argument in verses 14, 15, 16 (using slide 8). Use the space indicated "text" to fill in a summary of the argument in each pasuk. Students should understand how the three verses form a logical argument.

They should recognize that in v. 14, Zion presents the problem.

In v. 15, God affirms His love

In v. 16, God affirms His attention.

Verses 17 and following actually present the potential solution to the problem.

These verses are covered in the worksheet, on which the starred questions are more challenging.

### **Reviewing Worksheet on Isaiah 49:17-19**

In reviewing the sheet, focus first on verse 17, and ensure that students understand two main solutions to the two problems: 1. More 'sons' of Jerusalem (i.e. new Jewish immigrants) will arrive; 2. Destroyers will leave. In discussing the historical realities of these promises, note two events that developed in the period of Ezra-Nehemiah, about 60 or 70 years after the initial Return after Cyrus. (Rough dates: Cyrus declaration and return took place around 538 BCE. The dates of the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah are debated, but take place in the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> c BCE).

- a. The new wave of immigration under Ezra, which brought more Jews from Babylon to the Land of Israel, and the lottery Nehemiah records, which brought more Jews from all around Israel to settle Jerusalem.
- b. The Samaritan schism, in which some of those who apparently opposed building in Jerusalem developed the Temple at Shechem and in that sense "left" Jerusalem.

Verse 19 is quite difficult, and it is unlikely that students will be able to "unpack" it themselves. It is therefore presented in slide 9, with the expectation that the teacher will review it and students will realize that it contains the same two elements as v. 17.

### **Summary of Isaiah 49:14-19**

Students should appreciate that the chapter gives voice to the feelings of abandonment of the Jews in the Land of Israel, and that it then gives both a divine promise of love, and some

practical measures to solve the problems: a. More immigration; b. A 'split-off' of those who opposed the building in Jerusalem.

With capable classes, it is worthwhile to teach the passage from Pesikta de Rav Cahana on this haftara, which illustrates the idea that Jews have repeatedly accused God of abandoning them while He takes care of them. This raises a host of serious theological questions in a post-holocaust world, and it is only worth teaching this passage if the teacher is willing to entertain these.