

Isaiah 57:17-19 + 58:8-14
Isaiah 5:8-16 + 6:3

The haftarah reading paired with **Leviticus 14** (the cleansing of the leper) mentions Israel as being "smitten" by God - a word interpreted elsewhere by the rabbis as afflicted with leprosy.

Isaiah 57:17 - "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart."

Smote = *nakah* - to strike, to wound

Isaiah 53:4 - "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten (*nakah*) of God, and afflicted."

Talmud: `surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him a leper, smitten of God and afflicted...' (Sanhedrin 98b)

The Hebrew words in **Isaiah 53:4**, stricken (*nakah*) and smitten (*mukkay*) are interpreted as referring to a leprous condition. As a leper was despised and rejected of men, so also was the Messiah despised and rejected.

Isaiah 57:18 - "I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners."

mourners = *'abel* - to mourn for the dead. Lepers were treated as dead, and were similarly as unclean as a dead body.

Isaiah 57:19 - "I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD; and I will heal him."

"Peace, peace" (*shalom*) the word for complete peace, wholeness and rest - is doubled, as the alternative to "Unclean, Unclean!" - the cry of the leper:

- **Leviticus 13:45** - "And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean."

Covering the lips was a sign of mourning. The leper was mourning for himself, because he was as good as dead.

And indeed, Zion/Israel is described in this way after the destruction of Jerusalem:

- **Lamentations 4:14-15** - "They wandered blind in the streets, defiled by this blood, so that no one dared to touch their garments. "Go away! Unclean!" men shouted at them. 'Away, away! Do not touch us!' So they fled and wandered. Among the nations it was

said, "They can stay here no longer."

The reading from the next chapter focuses on healing:

Isaiah 58:8 - "Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward."

health = *'aruwkah* - a different word than *rapha*. The image is of a long bandage used to heal a wound. It means healing plus the idea of wholeness and *restoration*. i.e. the leper now healed and cleansed is restored to his family, the nation and can enter the sanctuary. Also applied to restoring walls.

2 Chronicles 24:13 - "So the workmen wrought, and the work was perfected (*'aruwkah*) by them, and they set the house of God in his state, and strengthened it."

This also seems to link the passage to the "leprosy in a house" passage in **Leviticus 14**.

- **Jeremiah 30:17** - "For I will restore health (*'aruwkah*) unto thee, and I will heal thee (*rapha*) of thy wounds, saith the LORD; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after."

The rest of the passage in **Isaiah 58:8-14** (which we read during every fast) outlines what it means to *NOT* be leprous:

Isaiah 58:12 - "And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in."

"breach" - *perets* - breach, breaking forth

This could be seen as a reference to pulling out the stones of a house infected with leprosy. Since God accomplished this for the Temple with an invading army, according to the rabbis, it might also be reflected in this verse:

- **Isaiah 30:13-14** - "Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant. And he shall break it as the breaking of the potters' vessel that is broken in pieces; he shall not spare: so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withal out of the pit."

Any earthenware vessels in a house stricken with leprosy were to be broken and destroyed.

The "breaking" of the walls of Jerusalem then is compared to the breaking of a potter's earthen vessel (infected with uncleanness from leprosy).

A leprous house was to be torn down and the stones deposited in an unclean place. A leprous garment was to be burned (**Leviticus 13:57**). A leprous person was to be cast out of the community. All these things happened to the Temple and to Jerusalem and its inhabitants.

Furthermore, an earthen vessel in which something unclean had entered was declared unclean, and required to be smashed and broken in pieces (**Leviticus 15:12**). This does not relate directly to leprosy, but the principle is the same.

If a house was judged to be leprous, after shutting it up, they would take out the leprous stones:

Leviticus 14:42 - "And they shall take other stones, and put them in the place of those stones; and he shall take other mortar, and shall plaister the house."

This could also be touched on in **Ezekiel 13**, where the inhabitants of Jerusalem "build a wall" of false prophesies, and others "daub it with untempered mortar," only to have God destroy it with hailstones and an overflowing flood - the Babylonian army.

- **Ezekiel 13:10** - "Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar:"

i.e. they imitated the process for restoring a leprous house - only it was still leprous.

"plaster" in **Leviticus 14:42** and "daubed" in **Ezekiel 13:10** are the same word - *tuwach*, which is almost exclusively used only in these two chapters.

The final haftarah reading also references leprous "houses"

Isaiah 5:8-16 + 6:3

Isaiah 5:8-9 - "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth! In mine ears said the LORD of hosts, Of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without inhabitant."

The final, uplifting verse:

Isaiah 6:3 - "And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory."

The last haftarah reading is **2 Kings 7:3-11 + 8:4-5**

This concerns the four lepers, which we discussed earlier.

