

Haftarah

'Nations shall walk toward your light'



*Arise, shine, [O Jerusalem,]
for your light has come, the glory
of the Eternal is shining upon you!*

*Nations shall walk toward your
light, and kings towards your
sunrise.*

Raise your eyes and see!

Isaiah 54:1,3-4

Connection

In the Jewish liturgical calendar this Haftarah is the sixth of seven *haftarot* ('the seven of consolation') which are read after the fast day Tisha B'Av and in the weeks leading up to Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year).

Background

This part of Isaiah is regarded as part of 'Second Isaiah' (Isaiah 40-66), i.e., a set of prophecies and traditions associated with a preacher-poet living among the exiles in Babylon in the 6th century BCE whose writings were later attached to the First Isaiah.

Reflect

The prophet holds out a stunning vision of spiritual and material restoration for the exiles, and a universal expectation: all nations of the earth will one day 'walk toward' the light of the God of Israel (see v.3).

- The prophecy opens and closes with the image of light (God's glory).
'Arise, shine, for your light has come' (60:1).
'Your everlasting light' (60:20)
- Note the difference between the light at Creation ('Let there be light' Gen. 1:2) and the light of Redemption described in our Haftarah which is *personal* to God's people ('*your* light has come' 60:1).
- To the exiles suffering poverty and despair, verse 6 presents an extraordinary contrast: the restoration of Zion described in terms of abundant worldly wealth.
- '*Your gates shall be open always'* (60:11). Refers to a vision of perpetual peace. Since there is no threat of war, the city gates remain open day and night.
- '*Pride of Lebanon'* (60:13). A reference to the cedars of Lebanon which were used in the building of the first Temple.
- '*The place where I rest'* (60:13). (Lit. 'where my feet rest.') Perhaps a reference to the Holy of Holies in the Temple.

Ponder

Ponder the light imagery in this reading, and reflect on the experience of light, darkness, shadow in your own story of faith; e.g., a moment when you felt the Lord '*shining upon you*' (v.1) or when you *walked 'toward your light'* (v. 3) or you were able to '*raise your eyes and see*' (v.4).

Bibliography: Plaut, *The Haftarah Commentary* (NY, 1996); Sarna, ed., *The JPS Bible Commentary: Haftarot* (Philadelphia, 2002). Scripture quotations: Plaut.