

Haftarah

'My love shall never depart from you'



*'Though the mountains may depart
and the hills be removed,
My love shall never depart from
you, and My covenant of peace
shall not be removed—says the
One who loves you, the Eternal.'*

Isaiah 54:10

Connection

In the Jewish liturgical calendar this Haftarah is the fifth 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 prophecy promises unimaginable transformation in the face of utter desolation and despair. Although exiled in Babylon and far from home, the Israelites are reassured that God is still with them and will restore them to their land and to their life as a religious people faithful to the covenant. The movement from desolation to celebration is described in terms of women in difficult circumstances:

- The barren woman. *'Sing, O barren woman who has never given birth; Break out in song, you who have never been in labor'* (54:1).
- The widow. *'No more will you remember your disgrace as a widow'* (54:4).
- The abandoned/divorced wife. *'The Eternal calls you "wife" again, O once abandoned and broken-hearted'* (54:6).

Recall that:

- In the bible, the God-Israel relationship is often described in marital terms: bridegroom-bride, husband-wife... Idolatry is described as adultery, exile as divorce, repentance as spouses reconciled.
- In ancient times a woman without male support/protection was economically and socially vulnerable. Often in the Torah we hear of God's concern for widows (as well as orphans, strangers, those most disadvantaged in society) and the expectation that the people of Israel take care of the widows, orphans and the strangers in their midst.

Note the two reassurances that divine commitment overcomes alienation:

- i) with reference to the covenant with Noah (54: 8-9)
- ii) with reference to nature (mountains, hills. 54:10)

Share

Which verse speaks with particular power and meaning to you? Take this verse with you as part of your prayer this day.

Bibliography: Goldstein, *The Women's Haftarah Commentary* (Woodstock, Vermont, 2004); Plaut, *The Haftarah Commentary* (NY, 1996); Sarna, ed., *The JPS Bible Commentary: Haftarah*