

Haftarah

'I will make with you an everlasting covenant'



*Ho, all who are thirsty,
Come for water,
Even if you have no money;
Come, buy food and eat.*

.....

*Why do you spend money for what
is not bread,
Your earnings for what does not
satisfy?*

Isaiah 55:1-2

Connection

This Haftarah is the third of seven *haftarot* [plural of *haftarah*] known as 'the seven of consolation' which are read in the weeks leading up to Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year).

Background

Our Haftarah comes from 'Second Isaiah' (Isaiah 40-66), i.e., a set of prophecies and traditions associated with a prophet living among the exiles in Babylon in the 6th century BCE, around the time of the decree of King Cyrus. This decree would eventually allow for the return of the Judeans exiled in Babylon to their homeland. Isaiah offers words of comfort to the people... the sadness and despair of captivity will soon turn to liberation and glory.

Reflect

- *'I will make your battlements of rubies, Your gates of precious stones...'* (54:12). The renewal of the people is described in images of Zion rebuilt (vv.11-12), foundations, walls and gates elaborately fortified...
- *'And all your children will be disciples of the Lord...'* (54:13). Spiritual renewal is expressed in terms of discipleship.
- *'And great shall be the happiness of your children'* (54:13). In the midrash, rabbinic commentators play with the Hebrew for 'your children/sons' [*banayikh*] and a similar sounding word which means 'your builders' [*bonayikh*]. Thus it was taught that children knowledgeable in Torah are the culture builders of the next generation (BT Berakhot 64a).
- Righteousness is the basis of this hopeful transformation (see 54:14).
- *'All who are thirsty, Come for water'* (55:1). Hunger and thirst can be understood as the deprivation of divine teaching (cf. Amos 8:11). The appeal may be either to Israel who yearns for renewal by God or to the gentile nations who are uninstructed in divine ways.
- *'And I will make with you an everlasting covenant, The enduring loyalty promised to David'* (55:3). The figure of King David and all he represents looms large in the consciousness of the exiles. If they are faithful to God, then the covenant given to David (2 Sam. 7:4-17) will belong to the whole people. Over time the Jewish people came to expect the messiah to be a descendent of David.

Ponder and pray

In whatever way you experience 'hunger' and 'thirst' in your life/family/parish/church, pray the words of consolation in this Haftarah and allow the Lord's hope, peace, confidence to find a home within you.

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