

Haftarah

'But there will come a day...'



“Therefore [teach them]:
one command and then another,
one line and then another,
a little here, a little there!
So he [the prophet] must talk to
this crowd with slow speech and
simple words, and say to them:
*Here is rest; rest for the weary;
repose is here.*
[Still] they refuse to listen.”

Isaiah 28:10-12

Links

- In the Jewish calendar, this Haftarah reading (Isaiah 26:6-28:13; 29:22-23) accompanies the Torah portion *Shemot*: Exodus 1:1—6:1.
- The Torah portion tells of the enslavement of the Israelites and the beginnings of the divine rescue plan. The Haftarah reading likewise speaks of disaster and deliverance, while also pointing to the culpability of the people in their own misfortune.

Background

- Isaiah 1:1 introduces the prophet Isaiah as ‘son of Amoz’ who undertook his ministry of prophecy in the Southern Kingdom (Judah) during the reign of Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, i.e., approximately 738 BCE until 701 BCE or later.
- The prophetic voice in this section of Isaiah speaks from the time before the Babylonian invasion of Judah. However during his lifetime Isaiah witnessed two wars and the annihilation of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) by the Assyrians in 722 BCE.

Ponder

- *‘Israel shall blossom and bloom’* (27:6). An optimistic opening quickly gives way to the prophet’s lament for the destruction of the Northern Kingdom: *‘The fortified city is empty, its homes deserted, forsaken like a wilderness’* (27:10).
- But there is hope: *‘But there will come a day when...you will be picked up one by one, O people of Israel’* (27:12). *‘Those lost in Assyria...shall come back and worship the Eternal on the holy mountain in Jerusalem’* (27:13).
- The immoral excesses of the rich are seen as the root of Israel’s demise. The evils of alcohol abuse in particular are vividly described: *‘Yes, every table is covered with vomit and filth’* (28:8). Even *‘priest and prophet reel with liquor, are besotted with wine and totter in judgment’* (28:7).
- Note in 28:13 the repetition of the ‘simple speech’ verse of 28:10. One interpretation: Both prophet and God resort to treating the people like small children who learn at the slowest pace—one word, one letter at a time. Yet still both prophet and God are ignored.

Reflect

- Which verse(s) in this Haftarah especially caught your attention/ imagination? Share a reaction, question, or observation.
- *‘No more shall Jacob be put to shame’* (29:22). The final two verses, taken from elsewhere in Isaiah, are added by the rabbis so as to finish the Haftarah reading on a note of comfort. Reflect on the importance of offering people hope, especially amidst harsh critique.

Bibliography: Harper Collins Study Bible: NRSV (NY, 1993); Plaut, *The Haftarah Commentary* (NY, 1996); Scripture quotations: Plaut (trans. Chaim Stern)

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Text: Teresa Pirola. Illustration: Sarann Ryan. © The Story Source, 2011. *Haftarah* (from the Hebrew root word; ‘to conclude’) is the name given to the reading which, in accordance with the Jewish lectionary, is read after the Torah portion of the day, at Shabbat and festival services.