

Haftarah

'The oppressed shall speedily be released'



How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

Isaiah 52:7

Connection

In the Jewish liturgical calendar this Haftarah is the fourth of seven *haftarot* known as '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

Our Haftarah sends a message of divine comfort to the Judaeen exiles in Babylon. Through a change in political circumstances (i.e., the edict of King Cyrus in 538 BCE), the Jewish population would eventually be allowed to return to their homeland rebuild their lives and traditions. The message here is that God will renew divine sovereignty in Zion (Jerusalem) and that victory will be clear for all to see.

Reflect

This Haftarah reading can be viewed as having four sections, each beginning with a double-proclamation:

I. ***'I, I am he who comforts you...'*** (51:12).

The Lord reminds the exiles 'You are my people' (v.16) and assures them that redemption is at hand. There is nothing to fear; they shall not die and they shall not lack bread. Note the use of creation imagery in this section (vv.12-16). The Lord is Creator, whose power is greater than any human threat.

II. ***'Rouse yourself, rouse yourself!'*** (51:17).

As if calling for human collaboration in this coming act of liberation, the voice of the Lord, in the mouth of the prophet, calls Jerusalem to stand up and actively respond. The sufferings of God's people are recalled, but a new day is at hand as their God 'pleads the cause of his people' (v.22).

III. ***'Awake, awake!'*** (52:1).

Jerusalem continues to be called forth. Images of being clothed, purified, set free from captivity describe the movement from sorrow to joy. Similarly, images of messengers and sentinels announcing good news depict the moment of liberation as a victorious king returning to his home city amid shouts and songs of joy.

IV. ***'Depart, depart, go out from there!'*** (52:11).

Just as God led the Israelites out of Egypt in the first exodus, so will the captives be led out of Babylon.

Share

What caught your attention in this reading? Which verse(s) speak most clearly to you and why? How can the prophet's words rouse us to follow the Lord out of the 'captivity' that is part of our own hearts/lives?

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